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# An Evaluation of the Impact of a Couples Enrichment Program on Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness

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AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF A COUPLES ENRICHMENT PROGRAM  
ON RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION, COMMUNICATION, CONFLICT  
RESOLUTION, AND FORGIVENESS

by

Chelsi Klentz Davis

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AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF A COUPLES ENRICHMENT PROGRAM  
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University of Nebraska, 2015

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Relationship enrichment programs serve to promote the development of healthy intimate relationships (Halford, Markman, Kling, & Stanley, 2003). There are hundreds of relationship enrichment programs available in the United States, alone (smartmarriages.com, 2013). Weekend to Remember is a faith-based relationship enrichment program which has not yet been the subject of empirical evaluation. This is not unusual. A select few of these types of interventions have received research attention, and little of this research has been published in peer reviewed journals. This study aims to contribute to this small body of existing literature by examining the effectiveness of the Weekend to Remember program on couples' relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Maintenance of these changes, and the influences of gender, length of marriage, and level of religiosity on the study variables were also examined. The relationship between forgiveness and conflict resolution was also of interest. This was measured through pre, post, and follow-up assessment of couples, using comparisons between a wait list control group and treatment group. Participants included 49 straight couples. The present study used a longitudinal and correlational design to observe changes in participants after engaging in the Weekend to Remember relationship enrichment program. Analyses involved repeated measurement of the same

subjects compared to a wait list control group at two (two surveys administered one month apart before attending Weekend to Remember) and three (pre, post, and follow-up assessment) time points. Analyses also examined the relationship between demographic and study variables. Both the couple and individuals were the units of analysis. Results indicated that participation in Weekend to Remember increased healthy conflict resolution and this gain was maintained at eight week follow-up. Results did not support an increase or maintenance of relationship satisfaction or forgiveness. Over time, communication did significantly improve, and this gain was maintained. Relationship satisfaction upon entering the intervention, gender, length of relationship, and religiosity were not found to predict significant differences in the study variables. Conflict resolution and forgiveness significantly correlated with one another at pre and follow-up, but not at post assessment.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The quality of intimate relationships has been found to be influential at personal, interpersonal, family, and societal levels (Halford et al., 2003; O'Halloran, Rizzolo, Cohen, & Wacker, 2013). A significant amount of time, energy, and resources are consistently devoted to developing, maintaining, and improving these relationships at each of these levels (Halford et al., 2003). Relationship enrichment programs emerged in the early 1950s with the goal of strengthening the marriages of many couples at the same time. Since their initial development, the number of these programs has extended into the hundreds (smartmarriages.com, 2013). Weekend to Remember is just one example of these types of programs. It is a nationally recognized, faith-based, nonprofit relationship enrichment and education program for couples, designed to strengthen and rejuvenate relationships (Familylife, 2013). Weekend to Remember serves as an intervention effort, assisting dating, just married, and long married couples with varying levels of distress to fortify their bond by learning ways to improve overall relationship satisfaction, strengthen communication, effectively resolve conflict, and express forgiveness to one another (Familylife, 2013). The program aims to provide couples with tools to facilitate continued relationship enrichment after the conclusion of the weekend. Though it reaches over 50,000 individuals on average each year (M. Pickle, personal communication, June 17, 2013), this program lacks rigorous empirical evaluation, much like other faith based (e.g., Christian PREP, Markman, Blumberg, & Stanley 1991; Marriage Encounter, Bosco, 1972; PAIRS faith adaptation, Demaria & Hannah, 2003; Program for Strong



African American Marriages, ProSAAM, Markman et al., 1991; Relationship Enrichment Facilitating Open Communication, Understanding, and Study, REFOCUS, Archdiocese of Omaha, 1985), and secular enrichment programs (e.g., Better Mariages, Mace & Mace, 1974, 2010; Celebrating Marriage, Covino, Rendler, Buscemi, Madden, 1994; Getting the Love you Want, GLYW/Imago, Hendrix, 2007; Training in Marriage Enrichment, TIME, Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1984). Tension exists between the need to provide enrichment programs to couples (in hopes of improving relationships and preventing the development/escalation of problems) and the need to know more about effective relationship education (Halford et al., 2003). To fully realize the potential benefits of these programs, it is necessary that they undergo evaluative research. Given these programs' potential influence on such a large population, evidence in support of their efforts ensure individuals and couples seeking relationship enrichment are receiving an effective intervention and are not, in fact, being harmed. Two relevant principles of the APA ethics code (2002) for a study that evaluates an intervention such as is conducted here are beneficence (i.e., effectiveness) and nonmaleficence (i.e., do no harm). The current research examined the effectiveness of this faith-based enrichment program in terms of evaluating perceived relationship satisfaction, degree of healthy communication, healthy conflict resolution, and thoughts of forgiveness towards one's partner. These variables were measured through pre, post, and follow-up assessment, using comparison between a treatment group and a wait list control group. The potential for harm would be indicated by significant decreases as a result of the intervention in any

of the study dependent variables (i.e., relationship satisfaction, communication, forgiveness, and conflict resolution).

### **Intimate Relationships**

By the age of 50, a majority of individuals in the world marry (Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008). This form of intimate relationship has been found to be salient across almost all countries, cultures, and religions (United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Population Division; UNESAPD, 2003). The prevalence of marriage across cultures and the majority of individuals who choose to enter into this union reflects the powerful role it plays in the network of society. Additionally, in Western countries, a majority of those who choose not to get married enter into long-standing, committed, “marriage-like” cohabiting relationships (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Due to the egregious personal, social, and economic costs associated with relationship distress and divorce, government and community agencies tend to promote the dissemination of programs aimed toward relationship enrichment and distress prevention. (Halford et al., 2008). In fact, the proposition of bills aimed to lower divorce rates has become a growing trend (Mandarano, 2011). These bills typically propose that judges be provided the option to require marriage counseling before granting a divorce (Mandarano, 2011). Whether married or not, the case could be made that all individuals have a high stakes interest in the success of this institution (Hunt, Hof, & DeMaria, 1998). In fact, it has been postulated that the best way to improve families is to focus on the marriage relationship, as the quality of this relationship significantly influences the quality of relationships both within and outside of the home (Hunt et al., 1998). Clearly, intimate relationships are

recognized among a large proportion of individuals as being valuable and desirable. In addition to being valuable, intimate relationships are almost universally desired to be stable and of high quality (UNESAPD, 2003). Most couples report high relationship satisfaction upon entering marriage and express hope that it will be a lifelong relationship (Halford et al., 2003). Unfortunately, marriages have been found to be increasingly unstable in a variety of ways (e.g., lack of longevity, chronic dissatisfaction, ineffective conflict management (Cornelius, 2003). As such, intervention efforts such as couples enrichment programs aimed at improving these relationships have been created.

### **Relationship Enrichment**

Enrichment programs have emerged as an educational approach for the purposes of enhancing couples' relationships (Bowling, Hill, & Jencius, 2005) and have become widely available in many developed countries (Halford et al., 2008). The concept of relationship enrichment originated among spiritual leaders who informally counseled premarital couples with the intention of strengthening marriages (Halford et al., 2003). Religious groups first provided structured relationship education programs with multiple couples in the early 1950s. By the mid-1950s, secular organizations began to offer such programs in the United States, Australia, and other Western countries (Hunt et al., 1998). The popularity of such interventions is evidenced by the estimated one quarter to one third of engaged couples in the United States, Australia, and Britain by the late 1990s who attended some form of relationship education prior to getting married (Halford et al., 2003). At present, Relationship Enhancement (Cavedo & Guernsey, 1999), Better Marriages (formerly the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment, A.C.M.E.,

Mace & Mace, 1974), the Couples Communication Program (CCP, Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1975), Celebrating Marriage (Covino et al., 1994), Getting the Love you Want (GLYW, Hendrix, 2007), Marriage Encounter (Bosco, 1972), Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS, Gordon & Durana, 1999), Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP, Markman et al., 1991), PREPARE/ENRICH-Growing Together Workshop (Olson & Olson, 1999), Training in Marriage Enrichment (TIME, Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 1984), and, of course, the Weekend to Remember (FamilyLife, 2013) are just some of the enrichment programs currently available in the United States. Though original programs focused upon premarital couples, relationship enrichment has evolved to provide assistance to couples who have been married for any number of years who seek relationship enrichment and/or help for distressing relationships (Hunt et al., 1998).

Couples tend to consistently develop distress in several aspects of their relationship: communication, conflict resolution, and overall low relationship satisfaction. These aspects are described individually later in this research, but in reality each influence and are influenced by one another. First among these factors are communication difficulties (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Among distressed couples, communication problems involving greater negativity, reciprocity of negative behavior, sustained negative interaction, and escalation of negative interactions are found more consistently than among couples with lower levels of reported distress (Fincham & Beach, 1999, Gottman, 2014). Relatedly, other factors include difficulties in achieving and maintaining healthy conflict resolution, (DeMaria, 1998). Concerning conflict

specifically, distressed couples have been found to make more negative and fewer positive statements about their partners and display great reciprocation of negative behaviors during problem solving interactions than nondistressed couples (Gottman 2014). One of the biggest challenges among couples who become locked into negative exchange cycles is finding adaptive, creative, and effective ways to change these patterns of conflict. Distressed couples are more likely to respond to negative affect than nondistressed couples, creating predictable, repetitive, negative patterns. Nondistressed couples have been found to be more responsive to repair attempts and have greater success with ending negative exchanges earlier in the conflict process (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Relatedly, forgiveness is associated with relationship satisfaction and is hypothesized to be influential in conflict resolution (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004). Partners inevitably hurt one another over time. Without forgiveness, the potential for lingering effects to chronically negatively influence resolution efforts is great (Fincham et al., 2004).

Traditionally, the purposes of marriage enrichment programs have included a myriad of goals intended to target these areas of distress, such as helping couples gain self and partner awareness, encouraging the development of empathy, intimacy, effective communication, conflict resolution skills, and positive forgiveness attitudes (Bowling et al., 2005). The Weekend to Remember goals are that couples “will learn how to: ... resolve conflict in the relationship...[and] express forgiveness to one another” (Familylife, 2013). “Good communication” is emphasized as “an essential skill for getting the most” out of the conference (Familylife, 2011, p. 24) as well as the couple

relationship. Overarching goals of the program are to “strengthen your marriage,” help couples “pursue a marriage that really works,” and “build and grow” their marriage relationship, (i.e., improving relationship satisfaction) (Familylife, 2013). Thus, the dependent variables identified for the current study, which correspond to the stated goals of the Weekend to Remember program, are (a) conflict resolution, (b) forgiveness, (c) communication, and (d) relationship satisfaction.

**Efficacy of programs.** Since the articulation of the scientist-practitioner model at the Boulder conference in 1949, the importance of basing professional activities on scientific evidence has been emphasized (Chwalisz, 2003). Though relationship education programs themselves are not necessarily developed or offered by professional psychologists, these programs provide a psychological intervention, which practicing psychologists may endorse, promote, and recommend to their clients as an extension of therapy. Halford et al. (2008), suggest that professional psychologists become involved in this research and the promotion of relationship enrichment because:

dissemination of [relationship enrichment programs] is going to happen, and researchers need to be involved to promote evidence-based approaches to [relationship enrichment programs] and continuing research and evaluation; and the process of dissemination and associated research has the potential to greatly expand the knowledge base about [relationship enrichment programs] (p. 497).

The current study contributes to the promotion of research on relationship enrichment and intervention by focusing upon the Weekend to Remember program.

Though efficacy research on relationship enrichment programs began in the 1970s, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a majority of these programs continue to lack empirical evaluation (Halford, 2004). Less rigorous, informal evaluations and

personal testimonials, however, are elicited by the Weekend to Remember as a means to provide evidence for its efficacy. For example, the Weekend to Remember program asks attendees for anecdotal evidence supporting their experience in this program and to rate their experiences on Likert type scales (i.e., “How would you rate the overall Weekend to Remember,” “How likely would you be to invite a friend to the pre-married[/married] sessions at Weekend to Remember,” “Did the getaway meet your expectations” FamilyLife, 2011, p. 133). See Appendix A for an example of the pre-married Weekend to Remember evaluation. There is also an evaluation for married individuals to complete, whose only difference is substituting wording of ‘pre-married’ with ‘married’ in the title of the evaluation and on subsequent questions.

Although consumer satisfaction is desirable and participant perceptions of the program provide valuable information and face validity, neither demonstrates an empirical effect of relationship enrichment on relationship outcomes. While this information can provide some general information on the effectiveness of this program, without the use of psychometrically reliable and valid instruments it is impossible to establish meaningful statistically significant program effects. It is therefore unclear whether their stated efforts to improve couples’ relationships, communication, promote healthy conflict resolution, and thoughts of forgiveness towards one’s partner are achieved (FamilyLife, 2013). Clearly, the lack of scientific evidence for many programs creates a need for continued scientific evaluation to be conducted, which the current research seeks to accomplish. The present study provides this rigor, using psychometrically established measures designed for use with adult couples and

individuals: the Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007), Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994), A Marital Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1987), and the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Enright, Rique, & Coyle, 2000).

The impact of enrichment programs is complicated to assess. For example, how impact is defined varies from program to program. Individual characteristics, goals, and methods of each program also contribute to this difficulty. Additionally, enrichment programs-such as Weekend to Remember, which was created and guided by a religious organization-are not typically designed based upon theory, literature review, or trained interventionists. This makes it necessary to extrapolate theory from the programs' methods prior to being capable of examining whether the program is in support of such theories and accomplishing what it seeks to accomplish. Moreover, relationship variables are constantly being influenced by and influencing one another (according to a systems perspective) (Galvin & Brommel, 2000), making it difficult to dissect one aspect from another. For instance, communication influences forgiveness attitudes and behaviors, both of which influence the role of conflict in the relationship, which also impacts communication and forgiveness. These factors make operationalization of constructs and assessment of efficacy less than straightforward. Also of note, the variables of relationship satisfaction and communication skills are clearly predominantly represented in the evaluation research on relationship enrichment programs, as evidenced by their dominance in the meta-analysis literature. The inclusion of additional variables of conflict resolution skills and forgiveness attitudes are included in the present study to address this gap in evaluated variables. Dissection of the current study's variables is



established through the use of separate measures for each construct (i.e., Couples Satisfaction Index, Funk & Rogge, 2007; A Marital Communication Inventory, Bienvenu, 1987; Ineffective Arguing Inventory; Kurdek, 1994; Enright Forgiveness Inventory, Enright et al., 2000). Relationships among these variables was also investigated.

### **Weekend to Remember**

The Weekend to Remember program was chosen as the subject of this research from the numerous other enrichment programs currently available for several reasons: its typical representation of couples enrichment programs, its faith-basis, and its lack of scientific evaluative research. According to Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, and Fawcett (2008), couples enrichment programs can be characterized by two components: 1.) emphasis on the development of improved communication and problem solving skills and 2.) didactic information regarding what healthy relationships consist of. The Weekend to Remember consists of both these components as evidenced by their stated goals and conference format. On the program website, it states “you will learn how to: resolve conflict in the relationship [and] discuss factors that make communication difficult” (Familylife, 2013), meeting the first criteria as a couples enrichment program as outlined by Hawkins et al. (2008). The second criteria of providing didactic information is met through the Weekend to Remember methodology of “teaching and couple’s projects [where couples] learn essential elements to a healthy marriage” (Familylife, 2013). Therefore, the Weekend to Remember typifies couples enrichment in its delivery,

foci, goals, and methods, which will be detailed in the program overview section and throughout Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Secondly, though most individuals attend couples enrichment programs with religious or spiritual underpinnings (Ehlin, 1999), faith-based programs especially lack representation among published evaluation efforts of relationship enrichment programs (Hart, 2009). The Weekend to Remember has been operating for over 35 years, reaching over one and a half million people (M. Pickle, personal communication, August 2, 2013). For all of the couples it has reached and continues to serve, it has never been evaluated by peer reviewed research methods, which was previously noted as a limitation in couples enrichment literature. As an example of faith-based relationship enrichment programs, research examining its effectiveness provides a meaningful contribution to this body of research.

## **Research Outline**

### **Objectives**

The first objective of the current research was to assess whether or not this enrichment program is accomplishing what it seeks to accomplish. Specifically, do the data provide evidence that relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and/or forgiveness are impacted by the intervention? This is done by comparing couples receiving the treatment with couples who had not yet received the treatment. This provides critical quantitative data to evaluate enrichment programs' efforts for couples in the process of improving their relationships. The second objective of the current research was to assess whether these effects are lasting. The complications of any long-term

research (e.g., retention of participants, unknown impact of confounding variables, cost, etc.) make this difficult to assess. The present research sought to address these issues through post- and follow-up data collection. Incentives for participation were provided by FamilyLife to promote continued involvement in the research. The use of a wait list control group comparison to the treatment group allowed for extrapolation of the impact of the program on the designated variables. This promoted being able to ascertain if changes were due to the treatment intervention (treatment group data is significantly different from wait list control data) or due to other confounding variables (treatment group data is not significantly different from wait list control data).

### **Potential Benefits**

There are several potential benefits to the current research. Again, although there are many enrichment programs offered throughout the United States (and the world), published literature evaluating the effectiveness of these programs, especially faith-based programs, is incomplete. This study provides a valuable contribution to the existing literature in this field. In this way, the study may be used to enhance treatment plans and intervention strategies for professionals working with distressed and distress prevention focused couples. Though evaluation research has been conducted on other enrichment programs, none to date has been conducted on the efficacy of the Weekend to Remember program. Data from this research may be utilized by this specific program to improve its intervention strategies.

### **Research Hypotheses & Questions**

This study examines relationship satisfaction, communication, forgiveness, and conflict management. It was hypothesized that couples attending Weekend to Remember would demonstrate significant positive gains in these areas as a result of attending the program. The following specific research hypotheses and questions are examined:

#### Research Hypotheses

H1: Couples will achieve statistically significant positive changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness after attending the program compared to the wait list control group.

H2: Treatment group gains will be maintained at statistically significantly higher levels at follow-up assessment compared to pre-treatment assessment.

H3: Forgiveness will be statistically significantly associated with better conflict resolution at pre, post, and follow-up assessment.

#### Research Questions

Q1: How will couples' relationship satisfaction influence gains in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?

Q2: Do men and women differ in perceived relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?

Q3: Do correlations on the four study variables differ between men and women when comparing pre-, post, and follow-up?

Q4: Does length of marriage moderate statistically significant changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at post- and follow-up data collection compared to pre assessment data collection?

Q5: Does level of religiosity moderate statistically significant changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at post- and follow-up data collection compared to pre assessment data collection?

The results of this study can be utilized by FamilyLife to provide evidence of the efficacy of this program and equip them to reach more couples who could benefit from Weekend to Remember. Additionally, the results of this study can be applied in future revisions of the program, potentially improving the quality of the programming so participants may

receive the best intervention possible. Thus, this research has potential benefits for the success of this program and its attendees.

### **Overview**

This chapter has outlined the potential benefit of relationship intervention for couples, while acknowledging that more research is needed to evaluate these programs. It has also asserted the need for intervention for relationships in distress. It has highlighted the support for prospective positive and negative impacts of relationships at varying levels of satisfaction upon individuals, couples, families, and societies. The need for systematic evaluation of enrichment programs, specifically the Weekend to Remember, has also been asserted. In addition, this chapter provided an overview of the mission of Weekend to Remember and the ways in which this study sought to examine the effectiveness of this program.

Chapter 2 offers further discussion of the current literature pertaining to relationships in general, as well as extensive examination of relationship enrichment and the theories from which they derive. Chapter 2 will also review other enrichment interventions. Married couples are the dominant participants of the Weekend to Remember enrichment program offered by FamilyLife. These couples were sought as participants in the current research. Couples were assessed at pre-, post-, and follow-up intervals. A wait list control group was created using individuals who registered for the conference one month or more prior to their scheduled attendance at Weekend to Remember. This design allows treatment effects to be seen (if present) after the conclusion of the intervention and if they continue to exist after treatment has ended

(Rausch, Maxwell, & Kelley, 2003). Chapter 3 describes in detail the procedures and statistical analyses utilized in this study. Chapter 4 provides information on the results of the study, and Chapter 5 presents a thorough discussion of these results as well as the limitations of the research, recommendations for future research, and implications of this research for the Weekend to Remember program and the broader field of relationship enrichment.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

Counseling psychology has historically focused upon the prevention of problems and building upon human strength. Relationship enrichment programs are an extension of this tradition, providing educational interventions to groups of couples with the overall goal of preventing the development of problems and improving relationships (Hawkins et al., 2008; Hunt et al., 1998; DeMaria, 1998). A shared fundamental assumption of these programs is that couples are capable of improving their relationships (Hunt et al., 1998). In response to the realization that one is in an unsatisfying relationship, those involved tend to search for ways to prevent their problems from further intensifying (Hawkins et al., 2008). One prevention/enrichment effort available to couples is relationship enrichment. The following chapter explains the need for relationship enrichment, describes the theoretical foundations of these interventions, illustrates how Weekend to Remember typifies relationship enrichment, and delineates the impact of these programs. It also provides greater detail on the study variables of relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict management, and forgiveness. Additionally, the influence of gender, level of distress, and religiosity on the effectiveness of this faith-based relationship enrichment program will be explicated. Lastly, an overview of Weekend to Remember is described, along with definitions of terms used in the research.

#### **Need for Relationship Enrichment**

Regardless of personal or societal beliefs about the legitimacy of the concept and definition of marriage, it has stood the test of time as an institution. Marriage occurs in

the majority of cultures and societies around the world in some form (Hawkins et al., 2008). Healthy marriages are also generally believed to provide a foundation for healthy families and societies. This intimate relationship theoretically provides a structure of how couples:

satisfy their most intimate sexual desires; provides for mutual support and nurture around life's most essential transitions (such as births, deaths, crises, illnesses); forms the basis for establishing a home/residence; is the basis for identifying parental responsibilities for children; and provides for the transmission of property, money, and other real resources of life (Hunt et al., 1998, p. *xi*).

Relationships provide powerful models for the next generation in how to meet their own needs and navigate responsibilities associated with adulthood (Brody, Arias, & Fincham, 1996; Glendon & Blankenhorn, 1995; Gottman, 2014). Without intervention, many relationships go from bad, to worse, to divorce (Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, Murray, 2005). Enrichment programs provide a service to couples seeking to prevent this destructive escalation of their problem(s). As relationships have been found to contribute significantly to overall well-being (Dush & Amato, 2005; Fincham, Beach, Lambert, Stillman, & Braithwaite, 2008; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005; Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011) focusing on them as a pathway to improved life satisfaction appears to be a worthwhile effort. Accumulating evidence suggests that healthy, mutually satisfying relationships are predictive of positive health (i.e., tend to live longer, have fewer health problems, spend about 25% less on health services), and improved well-being for partners and their children (Amato, 2000; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). Couples in more satisfied, less conflicted relationships also tend to be more financially stable, having a lower likelihood



of utilizing government support (Thomas & Sawhill, 2005). Other positive impacts which tend to be associated with higher quality romantic relationships include higher levels of social support, companionship, love, and sexual fulfillment (Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Relatedly, higher subjective well-being has been found among individuals in exclusive married, cohabiting, or dating relationships compared to single individuals who are not dating at all or are dating multiple individuals at once (Dush, & Amato, 2005; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005).

When compared to married individuals, divorced individuals tend to experience lower levels of overall psychological well-being and feelings of happiness and more symptoms of psychological distress, including poorer self-concepts (Gottman, 2014). Relatedly, mental illness issues, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicidality are more likely to be found among those involved in high conflict relationships (Fincham & Beach, 1999). While the absence of these does not guarantee the presence of mental health or positive well-being, lower levels of mental illness on average reflects a higher propensity for better overall mental well-being (Kendler, Myers, Maes, & Keyes, 2011). Additionally, significant positive correlations have additionally been found between mental illness and physical and psychological abuse (Fincham & Beach, 1999), indicating mental illness, relationship conflict, and psychological and physical abuse tend to co-occur. Moreover, individuals in more highly distressed relationships tend to report greater numbers of physiological diseases and disabilities, such as high blood pressure and impaired immune, cardiovascular, endocrine, immune, and neurosensory mechanisms, as well as increased health-risk behaviors (i.e.,

susceptibility to sexually transmitted diseases and accident-proneness) (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Among those who remain married but experience high amounts of conflict, specific illnesses such as cancer, cardiac disease, chronic pain, and overall poor health are more common than among those in low conflict marriages (Hunt et al., 1998). Research suggests that hostile behaviors occurring during conflict are related to alterations in immunological, endocrine, and cardiovascular functioning (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Divorced individuals also tend to report greater numbers of health problems and appear to be at a greater risk of mortality (Aldous & Ganey, 1999; Hemstrom, 1996; Murphy, Glaser, & Grundy, 1997). Moreover, these individuals appear to experience greater social isolation, less satisfying sex lives, and more negative life events (Kitson, 1992; Lorenz, Simons, Conger, Elder, Johnson, Chao, 1997; Simons and Associates, 1996).

Chronic relationship conflict and dissolution have been found to be associated with a variety of negative sequelae among partners, as well as their children (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). Crime, violence, drug abuse, and lower quality of education have been linked to dysfunctional family climates (Hunt et al., 1998). The offspring of those with problematic relationships tend to report higher levels of anxiety, depression, conduct problems, and physical health problems (Amato, 2000; Gottman, 2014; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005) as well as their own relationship discord (Amato & Booth, 2001). More than half of divorces involve children under the age of 18 (Amato, 2000) and almost 40% of children in the United States will experience the divorce of their parents (Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). In a meta-analysis by Amato

and Keith (1991), 92 studies comparing the well-being of children whose parents were divorced with that of children whose parents were married to one another were examined. Across these investigations, the researchers found that children from divorced families scored significantly lower than the comparison group on academic achievement, conduct, and social competence (Amato & Keith, 1991). Additionally, though a child's parents may not be legally divorced, having an unhealthy marriage (characterized by poorly managed conflict between partners) is a strong predictor of poor psychological adjustment in children (Emery, 1999), poorer parenting, poorer child adjustment, problematic attachment between children and parents, increased likelihood of parent-child conflict, and increased conflict between siblings (Fincham & Beach, 1999). More specifically, characteristics of marital conflict which have been found to be especially negatively influential on children include being more frequent, more intense, physical, unresolved, and involving child-related conflicts (Fincham & Beach, 1999).

Additionally, growing rates among children under the age of 18 in delinquency and crime, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, depression, as well as the increasing number of this population in poverty indicate global decreases in child well-being (Council on Families in America, 1995). This decline has been positively associated with dysfunctional family systems and distressed parental relationships by the Council on Families in America (1995). It has been proposed that couples who engage in relationship enrichment will be better able to maximize their potential as individuals and as a couple (Hunt et al., 1998). By improving this relationship, it is hypothesized that children, families, communities, and society as a whole will be relieved of the burden of the

various costs they would otherwise incur (Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). Through an increased understanding of what makes a marriage “successful” and how couples’ relationships can be improved, psychologists are better informed as to what to offer and recommend in the way of prevention/enrichment interventions (Hawkins et al., 2008). In addition, with improved knowledge, programs and other resources for couples can be created and improved to be most effective and efficient.

Intimate relationships have been shown through the above research to potentially influence not only those directly involved in the relationship and their children, but family, friends, and the overall society, as well. Chronic distress, conflict, and divorce, byproducts of the breakdown of committed and intimate relationships, exact substantial cost to public health, as previously discussed (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002). Prevention of the development and intensification of problems in intimate relationships is clearly beneficial to couples who participate as well as to the larger society, which must shoulder the burden of some negative consequences of relationship problems. Enrichment of relationships contributes to the well-being of individuals, helping them to be more productive in other aspects of their lives and in what they offer to the larger society. Because of these innumerable costs, active involvement in the prevention of relationship discord, treatment of relationship problems, and the enrichment of positive aspects of relationships can be argued to be beneficial at individual, family, and societal levels. This section has depicted the numerous needs for relationship enrichment interventions. The following section will clarify the theoretical foundation of these programs.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Relationship Enrichment**

There are a myriad of relationship enrichment programs available to couples. The development of these programs is largely independent of one another and lacking of a single theoretical framework from which to operate (Hawkins et al., 2008). However, theories to explain the process of marital satisfaction and enrichment have evolved from research and practice (Hof & Miller, 1981). Hunt et al. (1998) provides a set of fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and concepts that enrichment programs hold about marriage. These include:

1. A positive growth orientation for each partner as a person and for their relationship to the other partner.
2. A systemic, dynamic relationship between the partners who are willing to change as an open system.
3. A goal of enabling spouses to have an intentional companionship.
4. An educational, experiential approach to couples that teaches attitudes and specific skills in a structured, orderly fashion.
5. A preventive approach that seeks to support couples in ways that reduce the emergence, development, or recurrence of interpersonal dysfunction.
6. A balance between relational and individual growth in which the focus on the relationship interacts with helping spouses to reach their own individual potentials.
7. Development of intimacy and nurture.
8. Marriage enrichment and growth as a lifelong process.
9. Mutual support between couples through group experiences. (p. 15)

Bowling et al., (2005) delineate several theoretical underpinnings for relationship enrichment programs, including systems and learning theories (e.g., use of modeling, teaching, and social reinforcement techniques). These theories will be described in detail as they apply to relationship enrichment programs.

**Learning theory.** Learning theories share a basic tenet that the patterns couples practice are acquired through various means, such as behaviorism and conditioning (Classical-suggests individuals learn from repeated paired associations; and Operant-suggests individuals learn from consequences) (Baum, 1994). Behavior modification and

cognitive theories as applied to enrichment programs tend to employ concepts from social learning theory, using methods of: modeling, behavior rehearsal, prompting, and reinforcement (Hunt et al., 1998). According to these theories, unhealthy skills and dysfunctional patterns performed by distressed couples were originally learned in a variety of ways (e.g., modeling, associations, rewards/consequences), and as such, these skills and patterns are capable of being relearned and replaced with positive skills and more effective patterns using educational and experiential approaches. Reeducation of cognitions, cognitive functions, and behaviors are also encouraged (Hunt et al., 1998). This can be understood in terms of first and second order change.

First order changes describe the instance of continual individual changes, without impacting change within the structure of the overall system (Simon & Stierlin, 1985). For example, first order changes could be small modifications operating within the current assumptions or knowledge an individual holds about their relationship. These differences can be seen in clear, specific, and immediate adjustments to the relationship by the individual (Zimmerman, 2000). First order changes are targeted in the Weekend to Remember enrichment program through the relationship education component and encouragement of individuals focusing upon what *they* can do differently in the relationship instead of what their *spouse* can do differently (FamilyLife, 2013). First order changes are facilitated by the program through specific skills which are discussed and taught, such as giving focused attention, listening with acceptance and understanding, asking clarifying questions, making summarizing statements, and seeking and granting

forgiveness, in *Session 2: Can We Talk, Our Communication Toolbox* and *Session 6: We Fight Too, A Conflict Survival Guide*.

Second order changes describe qualitative, discontinuous changes in the system (Simon & Stierlin, 1985), or modifications in the shared system schemas and behaviors (Bartunek & Moch, 1987). Second order changes are targeted in enrichment programs by helping couples change their cognitions, interpretations, and ways of understanding their relationship. These changes address the overall context of the relationship and alter the assumptions couples are operating under within their relationship, as well as their actions towards one another (e.g., how the couple perceives their relationship satisfaction, how forgiveness is understood and acted out in their relationship) (Zimmerman, 2000).

Awareness of these relationship perceptions and behaviors (second order change) is facilitated and encouraged in the Weekend to Remember (FamilyLife, 2011). Couples are provided relationship education and are then invited to examine how these aspects are operating within their own relationships. The program then suggests couples consider how changes in their relationship schema may improve their relationship. This can be seen most clearly in The Weekend to Remember's discussion of expectations in *Session 1: Why Marriage Fail, From Throwing the Bouquet to Throwing in the Towel*. In this session, the impact of differing expectations are specifically explored in the areas of roles in the relationship, how love is expressed, sex, and plans for the future (FamilyLife, 2011).

Clearly, the group format of relationship enrichment programs facilitates social reinforcement, as originally described by Skinner (1969), but many view the impact of

this reinforcement that occurs during the learning phase as being secondary to the influence of repeated practice and modeling (Hunt et al., 1998). The role of social reinforcement in relationship enrichment programs has been suggested to be most influential in increasing positive feelings participants have about themselves and hope for their relationship (Chance, 2003). This is hypothesized to facilitate motivation to improve and continue developing relationship skills, even after this form of reinforcement is diminished after the conclusion of the program. Insufficient social skills are proposed by these theories to be significant components in relationship discord. Those who enter the program with deficits in social learning (i.e., how to appropriately manage conflict) are taught how to do so and encouraged to continue practicing these skills in *Session 2: Can We Talk, Our Communication Toolbox* and Getaway Projects *Can We Talk* and *From Wow to How* (FamilyLife, 2011).

**Systems Theory.** According to systems theory, in order to have a comprehensive understanding of communication between individuals, the overall communication context needs to be examined (Duncan & Rock, 1993). This theory of communication, known as cybernetics within systems theory, is based upon the premise that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of the parts’, meaning that what is created when individuals unite in a relationship with one another is more complex than the sum of both individuals (Galvin & Brommel, 2000).

When two individuals come together in a relationship, something is created that is different from, larger and more complex than those two individuals apart—a system. The most important feature of such a relationship is communication. Relationships are established, maintained, and changed by communicated interaction among members (Duncan & Rock, 1993, p. 48).



Systems theory suggests that communication is a symbolic and transactional process, which requires a focus upon relationships rather than on individuals. A system is defined as “a set of components that interrelate with one another to form a whole” (Galvin & Brommel, 2000, p. 51). Because of these connections, it is believed that when one component of the system changes or is changed, the other components in the system will change in response, which will in turn impact the original component (Ford & Lerner, 1992). Systems theory trades linear, cause and effect thinking for circular causality. In a relationship, “each of your actions serves as both a response to a previous action and a stimulus for a future action” (Galvin & Brommel, 2000, p. 60). Interactive complexity describes the futility of assigning cause and effect, implying that each behavior triggers a new behavior while simultaneously responding to previous behaviors (Ford & Lerner, 1992). Components of the system are mutually dependent upon one another; what one individual does or says is flexibly dependent upon what the other individual does or says (Duncan & Rock, 1993). Each individual in the relationship impacts the other, which subsequently impacts the relationship as a whole. As relationships develop over time, communication patterns and sequences are formed. These sequences of patterns can be said to characterize the essence of the relationship. It is not uncommon for these patterns to become problematic for couples, which has been found to relate to subsequent relationship distress (Gottman, 2014). In relationships, individuals coordinate their actions to create patterns which influence functioning in somewhat predictable and manageable ways (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). Even negative relationship patterns which couples would describe as ineffective and resulting in distress contain these

characteristics of predictability and management. Though one may be unhappy with the pattern, individuals may become comfortable in the sequence. Through patterns, individuals are able to understand behaviors that, in isolation, would be confusing or strange. They know how to respond to one another, because they have done it before. A level of homeostasis in the relationship is maintained through the detection of unacceptable deviations and subtle corrections (Ford & Lerner, 1992). Rules govern communication between individuals and are used to prescribe and limit one another's behaviors. This provides a context for use and negotiation of rules, and regularity is created out of potential chaos, which allows predictable, manageable patterns to develop over time (Galvin & Brommel, 2000).

Relationships are not static, but rather are an open system, engaging in ongoing exchange with the environment (Ford & Lerner, 1992). Interventions (the environment) aim to elicit positive changes in one or both components in the relationship system, with the belief that other components will subsequently be affected in a positive way. The emphasis on communication in this relationship system suggests it should be a target of intervention. Feedback processes are used to explain change in relationship patterns. Negative feedback processes maintain the current standards and serve to minimize change. Positive feedback processes seek to promote change, recalibrating the system at different levels (Ford & Lerner, 1992). In this way, individuals are not targeted as the problem in a relationship, but rather both members of the relationship share responsibility for the patterns characterizing the relationship. In the program workbook (FamilyLife,

2011), couples are given instructions in how to take responsibility for their role in their relationship over the course of the program:

Think about how you can apply the principles in your own life rather than what you think your spouse needs to learn.

Complete the projects-they are crucial to the getaway experience.

Decide upon at least two or three action points by the end of the weekend that you and your spouse agree to apply in the next 30 days. (p. 4)

### **Relevance to Weekend to Remember**

The Weekend to Remember is just one example of enrichment program interventions. This program is consistent with the same theoretical underpinnings typical of relationship enrichment programs, as described throughout this section. First order and second order changes (aspects of learning theories described above) are encouraged by the program, through the provision of specific skills and activities intended to make couples aware of their assumptions about the relationship, as well as how to alter these assumptions. Behaviors relating to communication and conflict management are specifically taught in Weekend to Remember. Social reinforcement can be seen as operating through the format of the intervention, which includes hundreds of couples participating alongside one another throughout the program. In this way, couples observe the hope others have for their relationships in the safe environment provided by the group. These factors are believed to facilitate positive feelings participants hold about themselves and their own relationship. Finally, the Weekend to Remember program places a value on the symbolic, transactional process of the relationship through its discussions on change. Change is discussed as being the result of transactional adjustments and attunement to the power of how one responds to their partner. As can be

seen throughout this section, characteristics typical of enrichment programs as a whole can be seen in Weekend to Remember, making it an appropriate representation of this type of intervention. This section has elucidated the theories underpinning this type of intervention, as well as how the Weekend to Remember represents these programs. The subsequent section will expound upon ways in which relationship enrichment programs affect the couples who participate in them.

### **Impact of Relationship Enrichment Programs**

High proportions of those who at some point in their relationship report dissatisfaction but persist in their efforts to strengthen the relationship report subsequent relationship improvement (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). This is encouraging for intervention efforts and provides hope for those in distressing relationships. Relatedly, divorced individuals, particularly men, express regret at not working harder at improving their relationship while they were still married (Johnson, Stanley, Glenn, Amato, Nock, Markman, & Dion, 2002). This should not be perceived to endorse the notion that couples in highly unsatisfactory relationships force one another (or themselves) to remain in their relationships; rather, relationship enrichment programs (and other intervention efforts) should intend to empower couples who wish to stay together and enable them to develop and maintain the kind of stable, satisfactory relationship that they desire.

One of the basic tenets of enrichment programs posits that relationship skills can be acquired and are capable of being malleable (Hunt et al., 1998). The educational component of enrichment programs relies upon this premise in its intervention strategy. Though each program is unique in its delivery, there is a general provision of material

intended to change the way couples learn how to interact with one another and think about their relationship (Hawkins et al., 2008). When evaluating whether these programs are efficacious, there is a question of a) are individuals/couples experiencing positive changes in specific variables immediately following the intervention, and b) if positive changes do occur, do they diminish over time? The current research addresses each of these questions through post- and follow-up assessment methods.

In general, relationship enrichment programs have been found to be successful in improving various aspects of relationship functioning and preventing the development of future relationship discord, as evidenced by over 100 published and unpublished evaluation studies and meta-analyses conducted since 1975 (Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2009; Bodenmann, Charvoz, Cina, & Widmer, 2001; Butler & Wampler, 1999; Halford et al., 2003; Halford, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2008; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). Though many meta-analyses on evaluation studies of relationship enrichment programs have been conducted, Jakubowski, Milne, Brunner, & Miller (2004) point out that less is known about the effectiveness of specific programs. Additionally, though these analyses provide generalized support for enrichment programs, a majority of the included studies in these meta-analyses are evaluations of the same programs (i.e., interventions based on the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program, PREP, Markman et al., 1991, Relationship Enhancement, Guerney, 1977; and the Couples Communication Program, Miller et al., 1975) (Blanchard et al., 2009; Halford et al., 2008; Markman & Rhoades, 2012). Additionally, research evaluating faith-based programs is extremely lacking, even though a majority of individuals attend enrichment

programs which contain a religious or spiritual component (Ehlin, 1999). The current study addresses this gap by evaluating a specific faith-based relationship enrichment program which has not been represented in previous research.

**Evaluations of faith-based enrichment programs.** The most researched faith-based relationship enrichment program, Marriage Encounter (Bosco, 1972), has been evaluated in 19 outcome studies (Jakubowski et al., 2004). However, only one of these studies is published (Milholland & Avery, 1982), and it is now over twenty years old. Marriage Encounter is a weekend retreat with 44 hours of structured content. Couples are taught through didactic presentation, and then are provided with time alone with their spouse to consider the material (Jakubowski et al., 2004). Milholland and Avery (1982) evaluated this program using an experimental design with non-randomly assigned subjects. Their results indicated Marriage Encounter effectively increased trust and overall relationship satisfaction in couples. Evaluation of nonpublished studies (using experimental designs with nonrandomly assigned subjects, randomized outcome studies, and posttest-only designs with random assignment) revealed that Marriage Encounter significantly improved affectional expression, dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, sense of commitment, and relationship satisfaction in couples (Jakubowski et al., 2004).

Research evaluating SANCTUS (Sager, 2002), another faith-based marriage enrichment program, found significant improvement in the marriage relationship using pre-and post-intervention comparisons without a control group. SANCTUS is a 48-hour weekend retreat where couples receive teachings and exercises to build self, spouse, and

spiritual awareness (Sager & Sager, 2005). Participation in the weekend is followed by five to seven group sessions and 50 days of couple meditations and daily exercises. Sager and Sager (2005), evaluated the success of the SANCTUS program by comparing ratings (using *t* Tests) given by participants at the start and conclusion of the intervention.

Ratings regarding participants' relationships with themselves, their spouse, and God, as well as intimacy and commitment were gathered. Of the 12 retreats assessed, all revealed significant positive change (Sager & Sager, 2005). There was an average of 40% improvement in scores on all posed questions. They did not ask for ratings following the weekly group sessions or 50 days of meditations and exercises, however. The authors note this is an area for future evaluation (Sager & Sager, 2005). There are no other published evaluation studies of the SANCTUS program. Therefore, the long term efficacy of the SANCTUS faith-based relationship enrichment program remains untested, though this research indicates significant positive changes in the intervention's goals occur immediately following engagement in the program (Sager & Sager, 2005). Existing research on faith-based programs indicates overall significant positive improvement in relationship satisfaction, though it appears research on faith-based marriage enrichment programs is conducted or published less frequently than research on secular programs.

**Meta-analyses of enrichment programs.** Hawkins et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis examining the impact of enrichment programs on relationship quality and communication skills. One hundred seventeen studies with over 500 effect sizes were analyzed. The majority of participants in the studies were White, middle-class, straight, married, and experiencing low relationship distress. Immediate post-assessments and

follow-up assessments were examined to assess for deterioration of effects over time. For experimental studies, follow-up timing ranged from 1 to 60 months following the intervention, with 3 and 6 months being the most common interval between assessments. Follow-up timing for quasi-experimental studies ranged from 1 to 36 months, with 3 and 6 months again being the most common interval between intervention and follow-up assessment. Experimental evaluation studies of enrichment programs generated effect sizes from  $d = .30$  ( $p < .05$ ) post-assessment to  $d = .36$  ( $p < .001$ ) at follow-up for relationship quality and from  $d = .43$  ( $p < .001$ ) post-assessment to  $d = .45$  ( $p < .01$ ) at follow-up for communication skills. Quasi-experimental studies yielded smaller effect sizes, from  $d = .15$  (non-significant) post-assessment to  $d = .20$  ( $p < .05$ ) at follow-up for relationship quality and from  $d = .14$  (non-significant) to  $d = .23$  ( $p < .01$ ). Hawkins et al. (2008) conclude that relationship enrichment program effects overall tend to be modest but significant, and do not deteriorate over time.

Jakubowski et al. (2004) conducted a comprehensive review of enrichment programs for the purposes of establishing and applying criteria for their classification as empirically supported treatments. They searched major databases (i.e., Digital Dissertation, ProQuest, ERIC, PsychINFO, Social Citation Index, Social Science Abstracts, and Family and Society Studies Worldwide) for marital enrichment studies conducted between 1970 and 2003. Only programs which had been empirically examined since 1990 were included in their analysis, which led to only 13 programs being eligible for review. The programs were evaluated and classified as either efficacious (supported by two or more published outcome studies by separate researchers using



control/comparison groups with random assignment), possibly efficacious (supported by one published outcome study or more than one study by the same research team with controlled randomization), or empirically untested (no published controlled randomized studies on the program). Given these criteria, only four programs (31%) were assigned efficacious classification: PREP, Relationship Enrichment, Couple Communication Program, and Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment. Three programs (23%) were found to be possibly efficacious, and six programs (46%) were empirically untested (Jakubowski et al., 2004). The researchers concluded from these results that overall effectiveness of relationship enrichment programs on improving relationship satisfaction has been supported. However, a vast majority of the numerous available programs have received no or too little rigorous empirical validation. Of note, none of these empirically validated programs are faith-based, further emphasizing the need to publish high quality outcome studies on these types of programs.

In another meta-analysis by Blanchard et al. (2009), the impact of relationship enrichment programs on couples' communication skills was examined. One hundred forty-three evaluation studies were reviewed. Only studies with follow-up assessments conducted at least six months after the interventions were utilized. The majority of studies included in the meta-analysis involved enrichment programs targeted at married couples (73%) lasting 9 to 20 hours. Average follow-up effect sizes ranged from  $d = .32$  ( $p < .001$ ) to  $d = .58$  (non-significant). The authors suggest that this provides evidence of couples enrichment programs' efficacy in preventing deterioration of communication skills (Blanchard et al., 2009).

**Evaluation of specific secular enrichment programs.** Two secular programs which have received prominent research attention are the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP, Markman et al., 1991) and the Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills program (PAIRS; Demaria & Hannah, 2003). Research findings of these programs will be addressed to provide foundation regarding the benefits of marriage enrichment programs as an intervention.

The PREP program consists of 8 to 14 hours of relationship education content taught within a group workshop format (Markman et al., 1991). It “aims to help couples maintain high levels of functioning and prevent marital problems from developing” (Markman et al., 1991). PREP targets topics such as communication, conflict management, and commitment using cognitive-behavioral marital therapy and “communication-oriented” techniques. It is the only relationship enrichment program to be reviewed by the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) to date (“NREPP,” 2015). NREPP is an online database of mental health and substance abuse interventions. While it is not a comprehensive list of interventions or endorsements, it provides a rating of the quality of outcome research on submitted interventions. When NREPP last reviewed PREP in January, 2013, it found positive outcomes in communication skills, confidence in the survivability of the marriage, bonding between couples, and overall satisfaction with sacrificing for the marriage or one’s partner, in addition to decreased incidence of divorce among participants (“NREPP,” 2015). Other outcome researchers have found PREP to improve communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, sexual satisfaction, and level of

marriage commitment (Hunt et al., 1998; Jakubowski et al., 2004), as well as overall relationship satisfaction (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988; O'Halloran, Rizzolo, Phillips, & Wacker, 2009). Of note, PREP has several iterations, including faith specific Christian PREP and ProSAAM (Program for Strong African American Marriages) which have a faith-based foundation. These pilot programs have not yet been the subject of published research evaluating their efficacy.

The PAIRS program (Demaria & Hannah, 2003) intends to enhance self-awareness and improve one's ability to develop and sustain positive intimate relationships in an educational format (Demaria & Hannah, 2003). It targets competency in three areas: 1.) emotional literacy, 2.) skills for building and maintaining intimacy, and 3.) practical knowledge, strategies, and attitudes for sustaining positive marriage and family life (Demaria & Hannah, 2003). It consists of 9 to 16 hours of teaching over the course of a day or several weeks. Groups of 6 to 15 couples typically attend each program, but one to over 200 couples can be taught at a time. Quantitative and qualitative research on the effectiveness of PAIRS indicates increases in marital satisfaction, affection, emotional well-being, cohesion, and self-esteem (Demaria, 2003; Demaria, 1998; Goss, 1995; Turner, 1998). PAIRS also offers several faith based programs for Jewish and Christian communities (Demaria & Hannah, 2003). Research studies on these specific faith-based versions have not received published research attention, to date. The studies described in this section focus on the immediate impact of enrichment programs. Another factor of importance to consider when evaluating program effectiveness is the lasting impact of these positive changes.

**Long-term efficacy of enrichment programs.** The long-term duration of change resulting from relationship enrichment programs has been evaluated in many studies (Halford et al., 2008; Jakubowski et al., 2004; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Laurenceau, Stanley, Olmos-Gallo, Baucom, & Markman, 2004; Wampler & Sprenkle, 1980). For example, an evaluation of the previously discussed PREP program revealed increases in overall relationship satisfaction and likelihood of couples remaining together five years after attending the program (Markman et al., 1988). According to this research, couples classified as “high risk” for future relationship problems seemed to benefit the most initially from the PREP program. Universal benefit for couples coming to the program at all stages of risk was detected from two to five years following the intervention. The long-term impact of the PAIRS program has also been evaluated. Six to eight months following participating in PAIRS, participants reported enduring positive changes in relationship satisfaction, marital adjustment, and conflict/unhappiness (Durana, 1996) as well as sustained gains in intimacy (Durana, 1998). Studies examining Couples Coping Enhancement Training (CCET; Bodenmann, 1997; Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004) and the Premarital Education and Training Sequence (Bagarozzi & Bagarozzi, 1982) programs have also found couples to exhibit positive benefits (i.e., increased relationship satisfaction and positive communication) two to five years following intervention (Bodenmann, Pihet, Shantinath, Cina, & Widmer, 2006; Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998). In a meta-analysis by Halford et al. (2003), 12 relationship enrichment studies were examined, all of which conducted follow-up assessments at least 6 months following intervention. This

analysis also found relationship enrichment programs to be efficacious in improving communication skills and relationship satisfaction immediately following intervention. Follow-up analyses overall indicate acquired relationship skills tend to be maintained over time, at 2 to 5 years (Halford et al., 2008; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993) and 3, 4, and 5 year follow-ups (Markman & Hahlweg, 1993).

Hawkins et al. (2008) meta-analysis of 117 relationship enrichment studies found immediate post-assessment program effects on relationship quality to not significantly diminish at follow-up assessment. Communication skills effects also did not statistically significantly deteriorate over time. The current research seeks to contribute to this body of knowledge by providing additional information on the lasting impact of the Weekend to Remember enrichment program. This will be done through the use of follow-up data collection and analysis. Also, much needed research on a faith based enrichment program is contributed. Additionally, the impact of relationship enrichment has been evaluated primarily focusing upon relationship satisfaction, with emphases on communication and conflict management. The current research seeks to contribute to the body of research on these variables, while exploring the additional variable of forgiveness. These constructs are defined and explicated in the following section.

## **Variables**

**Relationship Satisfaction.** Social science research concerning couples has dedicated considerable focus to the exploration of relationship satisfaction (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). In fact, the most commonly examined construct in relationship literature is “satisfaction” (Clements, Cordova, Markman, & Laurenceau,

1997). According to these researchers, “we simply take it on faith that human beings need to feel cared for, to feel important, and...to be romantically tied to a significant other” (Clements et al., 1997, p. 335). Though there appears to be an overarching need among individuals for love, support, and acceptance, many couples find themselves dissatisfied in their romantic relationships. When dissatisfaction occurs in this relationship, personal, work, and family problems tend to increase (Clements et al., 1997), as previously discussed.

It has been suggested that four factors impact the route of relationship satisfaction over time: 1) couple interaction (i.e., the cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes that occur when partners interact), 2) life events, 3) individual partner characteristics, and 4) contextual variables (i.e., cultural and social factors within which the couple relationship exists) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). These aspects are theorized to influence the likelihood of partners sustaining a satisfactory relationship over time or creating a distressing relationship headed for dissolution (Halford et al., 2008). Half of these are impermeable to intervention: life events and contextual variables, making them less amendable to targeted intervention efforts. The other two factors (couple interaction and individual partner characteristics) are more amenable to change as a result of strategic influence. Consistent with the emphasis of enrichment programs as a whole, the Weekend to Remember focuses on these two factors with its emphasis on communication patterns (couple interaction), conflict tendencies (couple interaction), and forgiveness attitudes (individual partner characteristics) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Halford et al., 2008). In

these ways, the Weekend to Remember intervention efforts are theoretically aimed at the most successful change targets.

Various theories of relationship satisfaction propose diverse perspectives of this construct. For example, attachment theory suggests that in order for partners to feel “satisfied,” relationship-related needs must be met (Raynor Koski & Shaver, 1997). This theory emphasizes the development of individual differences in relationship styles (and needs) as a function of caregivers’ behaviors. Specifically, personal needs and preferences such as desiring a high degree of certainty about one’s partner’s commitment or having a willingness to allow more autonomy and privacy are hypothesized as being the result of one’s history of relationships with adult caregivers. Evolutionary psychology, on the other hand, takes the view that the concept of mate selection poses recurrent adaptive problems and advantages (Schackelford & Buss, 1997). These adaptive challenges include identifying a reproductively fertile spouse, mate retention, and parental care and socialization. Those who are less adept at discriminating how a potential mate is likely to perform in each of these areas will be “out-reproduced” by those who are more perceptive. Relationship-related needs which are proposed to arise from these attachments include the desire to feel protected, loved, and secure. Another model of satisfaction postulates that the similarity of partners’ “philosophies of life” (“basic beliefs and assumptions about the world around them...and relative to the world,” Hojjat, 1997, p. 103) determines the degree to which they are satisfied in the relationship. Philosophies of life are formed through personal history and life experiences.

Included in this philosophy are beliefs that the individual assumes to be true in regard to intimate relationships (e.g., “Men are more romantic”), qualities that the individual

considers to be desirable or ideal in a relationship (e.g., “An ideal husband is someone who is caring”), and the individual’s own behavioral preferences in regard to relationships (e.g., “It is better not to marry before the age of 25”) (Hojjat, 1997, p. 103).

How partners perceive and attribute differences and similarities in their philosophies of life influence how they relate to and respond to one another, impacting how satisfied they are in the overall relationship.

A phenomenological approach to understanding this factor makes an assumption that it is not just one’s overt behavior that influences relationship satisfaction, but that one’s perception of their partner’s behavior has a direct influence on relationship satisfaction (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Research indicates that one’s level of relationship satisfaction is affected by perception of love attitudes, empathy, self-disclosure, and relational competence (Meeks et al., 1998). These processes are all influential in relationship communication; that is, how these processes are communicated (effectively or ineffectively) impacts whether or not one feels satisfied in the relationship and shapes ongoing interactions (such as how conflict is handled and how forgiving one is towards their partner). This relationship is investigated in the current study in research question 1: *How will couples’ relationship satisfaction influence gains in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?* No specific session of The Weekend to Remember’s manualized treatment is targeted at relationship satisfaction. Rather, the explicated overarching goal of the program could be interpreted as improving this construct (FamilyLife, 2013), which can be seen in the content ingrained throughout of all sessions of the intervention: *Session 1: Why Marriages Fail, From Throwing the Bouquet to Throwing in the Towel; Session 2: Can We Talk?, Our Communication Toolbox; Session*



*3: Unlocking the Mystery of Marriage, God's Purpose for Oneness; Session 4: From How to Wow, God's Plan for Oneness; Session 5: What Every Marriage Needs, God's Power for Oneness, Session 6: We Fight Too, A Conflict Survival Guide; Session 7: Marriage After Dark, Intimacy from God's Perspective; Session 8: Woman to Woman, Embracing God's Wonderful Design/Man to Man, Stepping Up to a Higher Call; Session 9: How Marriages Thrive, Essential Elements of a Oneness Marriage; Session 10: Leaving a Legacy, What Kind of Legacy Will You Leave? (FamilyLife, 2011).*

**Communication.** Communication is one of the most extensively researched aspects of couple interaction (Halford et al., 2003). One overall theme is that effective communication tends to predict relationship satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Markman & Hahlweg, 1993). Interestingly, effective communication in engaged couples has not been found to correlate with their current level of relationship satisfaction, but appears to be predictive of stable and highly satisfying relationships up to the first 10 years of marriage (Markman & Hahlweg, 1993). This suggests that communication difficulties do not prevent individuals from falling in love with one another or forming committed relationships, “but sustaining relationship satisfaction is more likely when there is good communication and conflict management” (Halford et al., 2003, p. 387). Therefore, individuals do not develop relationships necessarily because they have “good communication”. Relatedly, for couples that have been married for many years, effective communication has also been found to predict ongoing relationship satisfaction and a decreased risk of relationship dissolution (Clements et al., 1997; Markman, Stanely, Blumberg, & 2001). Relationship enrichment programs appear overall to produce

significant effect sizes related to improving couples' quality of communication (Blanchard et al., 2009; Butler & Wampler, 1999). This is particularly important evidence in support of the efficacy of these programs, as overall relationship satisfaction appears to be related to quality of the couples' communication, as previously noted.

Various theoretical models of relationship functioning, such as systems theory (Galvin & Brommel, 2000), social exchange theory (Miller, 2005), and the interdependence framework (Eyben, Morrow, Wilson, & Robinson, 2002), view communication as a critical component of romantic relationships.

Theoretically, couples' ability to manage negative communications as well as enact positive communications can enhance the health and viability of the relationship. Negative communication between partners can tear away at psychological vulnerabilities, which in turn can inhibit positive sentiments, affects, and connections within the relationship (Owen, Mathos, & Quirk, 2013, p. 336).

Relationship enrichment programs incorporating communication specific interventions aim to help couples reduce negative communication patterns and behaviors (stopping negative communication cycles) and create new, positive patterns of communication within their relationship.

Though the concept of communication is widely accepted as important to intimate relationships, it is unclear how healthy couple communication is most effectively promoted (Owen et al., 2013). Healthy communication has been characterized as being respectful and nonrejecting (Jekielek, Bronte-Tinkew, Guzman, Ryan, & Reed, 2004), cooperative (Lewis, Johnson-Reitz, & Wallerstein, 2004) and consists of listening without countering, making eye contact, speaking for oneself, seeking clarification, sticking to the subject, self-examination for motives, asking for behavioral change,

remembering partner's triggers, remembering one's own triggers, agreeing to disagree at times, and apologizing (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Unhealthy communication can be defined as "the presence of high amounts of negative affect, including criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and 'stonewalling,' a form of withdrawal" (Lewis et al., 2004, p. 199). The couple's communication patterns serve to both create and reflect the couple relationship. Individuals develop their communication skills within the context of the family, where they learn the cultural and specific familial communication codes (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). As children, individuals learn acceptable methods of expressing concepts such as intimacy and conflict, how to relate to other family members, and make decisions.

In *Session 2: Can We Talk, Our Communication Toolbox* the difficulties of communication are described. Couples are informed that each person communicates in various ways, and "1.) misunderstanding[s] can develop when we are at opposite ends of these styles, 2.) we must allow freedom for differences in communication style, and 3.) we can promote healthy communication by adjusting our style to honor each other" (FamilyLife, 2011, p. 25). This is followed by identification of different communication "levels" which increase in intimacy and transparency: 1) cliché-not revealing any personal opinion or insight, 2) fact-sharing what *you* know, 3) opinion-sharing what *you* think, 4) emotion-sharing what *you* feel, 5) transparency-sharing who *you* are, complete authenticity (FamilyLife, 2011). Couples are encouraged to "go to the next level" in their communication as a goal for the weekend (FamilyLife, 2011, p. 26). Couples are also warned that "anger can sabotage communication" (FamilyLife, 2011, p. 26), and it is

suggested that individuals should be open to changing any harmful habits they have acquired in the realm of communication. This focus is appropriate, given the finding that distressed partners, compared with nondistressed partners (a) are more hostile, (b) start their conversations more hostilely and maintain it during the course of the conversation, (c) are more likely to reciprocate and escalate their partners' hostility, (d) are less likely to edit their behavior during conflict, resulting in longer negative reciprocity loops, (e) emit less positive behavior, (f) suffer more ill health effects from their conflicts, and (g) are more likely to show demand - withdrawal patterns (Heyman, 2001, p. 6).

Interventions aimed at these tendencies are hypothesized to promote healthier behaviors as a means to prevent, reduce, or replace distress. Additionally, during *Session 2: Can We Talk, Our Communication Toolbox* in The Weekend to Remember program, listening and expressing oneself are taught, providing approach goals to coincide with the avoidance goals listed above. Whereas approach goals involve moving toward or maintaining an outcome or state, avoidance goals are negatively focused, attempting to stay or move away from an outcome or state (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001). It has been found to be beneficial to distinguish between approach and avoidance goals. Approach goals have been demonstrated to be associated with greater levels of subjective well-being and success than avoidance goals (Elliot et al., 2001). Approach goals for listening well are identified by Weekend to Remember: "give focused attention, listen with acceptance and understanding, ask clarifying questions; make summarizing statements, focus on what is being said, not the way it is being said" (FamilyLife, 2011, p. 27). This is again consistent with skills taught and practiced in communications skills training, systems theory, and Behavioral Marital Therapy. Lastly, additional resources to supplement further work in communication are suggested (*The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman, *The Language of Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerichs).

**Conflict management.** Conflict is an inevitable component of relationships (Gottman, 2014). Managing conflict has been suggested as an essential component in creating and maintaining “successful” (satisfactory) relationships (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). As the occurrence of less severe couple violence (e.g. pushing, slapping, or shoving) has been found to be associated with problems in conflict management within the couple (Galvin & Brommel, 2000), this aspect is especially important to evaluate and improve in an intervention program. By strengthening healthy conflict patterns, it is hypothesized that physical violence will be less likely. Relatedly, the absence of overt conflict does not suggest healthy relationship functioning; rather, conflict avoidance has been found to have negative long-term relationship consequences, such as emotional distance and loneliness (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Functional relationships are characterized by processing conflict more positively than dysfunctional relationships (Gottman, 2014). It has been hypothesized that functional relationships “engage in conflict when they struggle to make their differences more tolerable” (Galvin & Brommel, 2000, p. 222). Conflict can provide opportunities for positive change in the relationship and be a potentially positive force in intimate relationships. Individuals who discuss their differences and attempt to form agreements can improve their relationship, facilitate changes that are mutually beneficial, and increase love and caring. According to Galvin & Brommel (2000), “conflict can provide opportunities for valuable feedback that leads to innovations that enhance adaptability and cohesiveness” (p. 223). Conflict and communication are independent but highly influential on one another. Communication can serve to either facilitate or impede, resolve or perpetuate conflict. The level of

intensity of the conflict, in turn, influences the types of messages which are produced, the patterns of confrontations, and the interpretations formed, with lower intensities associated with more satisfactory outcomes.

When working with conflict management in an enrichment context, a central goal is typically to isolate constructive versus destructive aspects of existing conflict patterns (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). Couples tend to be taught to build upon (or create) healthy components in place of problematic tendencies, as can be seen in the Weekend to Remember program (FamilyLife, 2011). Researchers note that though conflict patterns can resist change, there is greater potential to change these patterns than other factors contributing to conflict (e.g., personality traits, differences in values, expectations, social conditions, economic conditions) (Sillars, Canary, & Tafoya, 2004). Research also suggests that conflict resolution patterns strongly influence relationship quality, particularly when the couple is in a state of turmoil versus stability (Sillars et al., 2009). This suggests that intervention aimed at improving how conflict is handled during times of relationship distress would be especially beneficial, provided that couples maintain practice of these skills following the intervention.

The Weekend to Remember considers conflict according to these approaches to conflict management. The program workbook introduces the topic of conflict (and incorporates the aspect of forgiveness) in *Session 6: We Fight Too, A Conflict Survival Guide*. This section states: “conflict is common to all marriages, the goal of marriage is not to be conflict-free but to handle conflict correctly when it occurs: healthy conflict resolution occurs when couples are willing to seek and grant forgiveness” (FamilyLife,

2011, p. 66). The intervention aims to normalize conflict, encourages constructive conflict, and suggests forgiveness as an essential component of healthy conflict. The normalization of conflict is a commonly used intervention in couples therapy (Stanley et al., 2002) and in therapy with individuals, the use of which provides “permission to know his or her own feelings, to value the significance of his or her affects, and to relate them to actual or anticipated events” (p. 189). The concept of constructive conflict is supported through research by Cummings, Faircloth, Mitchell, and Cummings (2008), who found psychoeducational skills training in arguing constructively (i.e., active listening, remaining in the “here and now”, checking for accuracy) to be effective in improving couples conflict. Research by Fincham et al. (2004) examining whether forgiveness in couples is associated with better conflict resolution found a lack of forgiveness to be significantly negatively influential in the management of problems in the relationship. Rather than endorsing avoidance of conflict, which has been associated with deterioration of relationship satisfaction over time (Gottman, 2014), direct “loving” confrontation is taught by the Weekend to Remember. Direct communication/confrontation of conflict has been found to be more functional than denial and indirect forms (Cummings et al., 2008), especially those that include defensiveness, stubbornness, or withdrawal (Gottman, 2014). The program suggests that couples ask where the conflict is coming from (i.e., are “rights” being violated, are expectations not being met, is one feeling hurt), examine the problem to determine if confrontation is indeed the appropriate step, consider personal contributions to the problem, and choose an appropriate time for the conversation and deliberately consider the words one uses (FamilyLife, 2011). These

suggestions are consistent with theories and empirically supported interventions, including communications skills training (Guerney, 1977) and systems theory (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). Specifically, research examining the effects of confrontation timing found it to be associated with reports of communication satisfaction (Ebesu Hubbard, Hendrickson, Fehrenbach, & Sur, 2013; Frantz & Bennigson, 2005). It appears that purposeful consideration of choosing when to confront one's partner is associated with greater satisfaction at the conclusion of the conflict. This is hypothesized to result from feeling heard and understood. Additionally, to inspire continued use of skills after the conclusion of the program, various maintenance opportunities are endorsed, such as additional reading materials (*Fight Fair*, by Tim and Joy Downs; *Peacemaking for Families*, by Ken Sande), group study materials (*Homebuilders Couples Series*; *LifeReady*, FamilyLife eMentoring), and an additional conference (The Art of Marriage, FamilyLife, 2011).

**Forgiveness.** It is virtually impossible to avoid hurting, letting down, betraying, angering, or disappointing one's partner at some point in the relationship (Fincham et al., 2004). Interpersonal transgressions have been associated with these strong negative emotions, which can be highly disruptive to the relationship. The abilities to seek and grant forgiveness have been found to be key factors in marital longevity and satisfaction (Fenell, 1993). Forgiveness is hypothesized to be influential in other aspects of the relationship, such as anger (Freedman & Enright, 1996) and conflict resolution (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Forgiveness first requires recognition of being wronged by one's partner as well as holding a belief that the transgression was either intentionally or



negligently inflicted. According to Fincham et al. (2004) “forgiveness occurs with the spouse’s full knowledge that he or she has a right to feel negatively toward his or her partner and that the partner has no right to expect the spouse’s sympathy” (p. 72).

McCullough and Witvliet (2002) point out that intentionality does not prevent one from granting forgiveness. One can intentionally hurt their partner and yet the victim can forgive the transgressor. Forgiveness involves letting go of past events and not allowing them to influence current and future events. Forgiveness is the core feature “of a transformation in which motivation to seek revenge is lessened” (Fincham et al., 2004, p. 72). This aspect distinguishes forgiveness from the distinct but related constructs of condoning, which denies the presence of an offense, and reconciliation, which is a restorative dyadic process. Forgiveness, by contrast, represents intentional willingness to leave the cycle of negative interactions (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002).

Fincham et al. (2004) suggest a multidimensional conceptualization of forgiveness, which includes a decreased negative motivational state (e.g., revenge, avoidance, resentment, anger, retaliatory impulses) and increased positive motivational state towards the harm-doer. “Unforgiveness” describes the avoidance of unwanted or unacceptable self-image inspired by the transgression and the corresponding negative emotions (Fincham et al., 2004). The first dimension of forgiveness according to Fincham et al. (2004), involves the victim overcoming a negative of self-portrayal which is promoted by the transgressor’s behavior. This negative view of self is inherently promoted by the transgressor’s negative behavior, which implies that they do not believe the victim deserves better treatment. By overcoming this negative self-view, an internal

barrier to relatedness with one's partner is removed, and the relationship is in a state amenable to moving forward. Couples using an interactional "tit for tat" sequence common in distressed couples (Fincham, 2004), are especially sensitive to the consequences of unforgiveness, making overcoming this dimension particularly crucial in developing a more satisfying relationship. The other dimension of forgiveness suggested by Fincham et al. (2004) concerns its positive direction. It is hypothesized that forgiveness is not only achieved by overcoming avoidance goals, associated with the first dimension, but also requires motivation for approach behaviors. Motivation for approach behaviors and motivation to overcome avoidance behaviors arise from separate motivational systems, and therefore the positive forgiveness dimension cannot be inferred by absence of the negative/avoidance dimension (Fincham et al., 2004).

Forgiveness is also believed to be related to conflict resolution, as mentioned previously. According to Fincham et al. (2004), "conflict resolution is integral to a successful relationship and it can be argued that resentment engendered by partner transgressions is likely to fuel couple conflict and impede successful conflict resolution" (p. 73). Forgiveness, on the other hand, promotes closure of painful relationship experiences and facilitates reconciliation. Research suggests that because of these factors, forgiveness has the capacity to be highly influential for long and short term relationship outcomes and interaction patterns.

Specifically, when one partner opts out of the coercive cycle of reciprocal negative interaction, the other should be less likely to continue his or her negative behavior as well. In short, forgiveness may short circuit the use of ineffective conflict strategies likely to emerge from the smoldering embers of an unforgiven transgression (Fincham et al., 2004, p. 73).

Thus, forgiveness is likely to be positively correlated with reports of effective conflict resolution practices. When avoidance and retaliation exist in the relationship, efforts at constructive problem solving are hindered. For example, when partners feel justified to engage in destructive problem solving behaviors because of unforgiven transgressions, this is highly likely to adversely influence attempts at effective conflict (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Relatedly, lack of motivation towards positive approach behaviors undermines efforts “such as accommodation (responding positively to a negative partner behavior) and thus allow more automatic, negative responses to predominate during arguments or disagreements” (Fincham et al., 2004, p. 78). This concept is examined in the current research with research hypothesis 3: *Forgiveness will be statistically significantly associated with better conflict resolution at pre, post, and follow-up assessment.*

As previously described, forgiveness is first introduced at the Weekend to Remember through discussion of its role in conflict resolution in *Session 6: We Fight Too, A Conflict Survival Guide* (FamilyLife, 2011). Forgiveness is first explored in a Biblical context: “The Bible teaches that all Christians are responsible to God to seek and grant forgiveness,” (FamilyLife, 2011, p. 70) and “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32, as cited in FamilyLife, 2011, p. 70). Next, steps in seeking forgiveness are suggested and examples illustrating these steps are provided:

1. Be willing to say you were wrong:  
“I was wrong. I shouldn’t have\_\_\_\_\_.”
2. Be willing to say you are sorry:  
“I am sorry I did\_\_\_\_\_and that I caused you to feel\_\_\_\_\_.”

3. Be willing to repent:  
“I know that I have hurt you deeply, and I do not wish to hurt you this way again.”
4. Be willing to ask for forgiveness:  
“Will you forgive me for doing\_\_\_\_\_?” (FamilyLife, 2011, p. 70)

Following these steps, the importance of granting forgiveness is suggested and steps in this process, as well as illustrating examples, are provided:

1. Do it privately first:  
“God, I forgive\_\_\_\_\_for hurting me.”
2. Do it specifically:  
“I forgive you for\_\_\_\_\_.”
3. Do it generously:  
“Let’s settle this issue and get on with building our relationship.”
4. Do it graciously:  
“I know I’ve done things like that myself.”

Then, trust is introduced as a component of both forgiveness and conflict management.

The program suggests that trust needs to be rebuilt over time and with intention

(FamilyLife, 2011). This concept is consistent with literature on trust. For example, in a qualitative study involving interviews with individuals who had experienced marital infidelity, Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler, & Miller (2002) found that many respondents were able to regain trust in their relationship through a rebuilding process involving reengagement, taking responsibility, reassurance of commitment, increased communication, and forgiveness. Another forgiveness model by Snyder, Baucom, and Gordon (2008), describes trust as a part of “moving on.” This stage involves 1) regaining a balanced view of one another and the relationship, 2) committing to not letting hurt/anger dominate their lives, thoughts, or behaviors, 3) forfeiting the right to punish one another, and 4) assessing how to continue on, in, or without the relationship.

Forgiveness is again explored in *Session 9: How Marriages Thrive, Essential Elements of*

*a Oneness Marriage* (FamilyLife, 2011). Optimal marriage is described as consisting of three essential ingredients, the second of which is ‘The Habit of Generous Forgiveness.’ According to the Weekend to Remember workbook, generous forgiveness is offered promptly, freely, and graciously and leads to security in the relationship (FamilyLife, 2011). Additional reading materials are recommended to participants as a supplement to this session (*Staying Close* by Dennis and Barbara Rainey, *The Love Dare*, *Day by Day*, by Stephen Kendrick and Alex Kendrick).

The four variables of relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict management, and forgiveness were chosen for this research because of their relevance in enrichment programs, as depicted in this section. The influence of gender, level of relationship distress, religiosity, and length of marriage are also hypothesized to be influential in how individuals experience faith-based relationship enrichment interventions. These factors will be explored in the following paragraphs.

**Impact of Level of Distress.** Relationship satisfaction has not been found to be a significant predictor of the likelihood of couples attending relationship enrichment programs (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). This suggests couples at varying levels of distress tend to engage in these types of interventions. However, the most positive significant effects from relationship enrichment programs may be found in higher risk couples (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, Loew, & Markman, 2012). Classifying couples’ risk levels (i.e., high vs. low) has been accomplished using several different methods. For example, Halford, Sanders, and Behrens (2001) designated women who experienced parental divorce and men who experienced parental aggression as high risk.

This classification was based upon the premise that having parents (in the family of origin) who were married with a mutually satisfied relationship (Pope & Mueller, 1976) and utilized nonviolent conflict management (Mihalic & Elliot, 1997; Widom, 1989) have been found to predict relationship stability and satisfaction. Therefore, persons with these family backgrounds were designated as low risk. In the Halford et al. (2001) study comparing high to low risk couples, the high risk couples were found to experience more significant benefits from the relationship enrichment program. Allen et al. (2012) classified couples who reported a history of infidelity in their marriage as high risk. In terms of overall marital satisfaction and communication skills, couples with a history of infidelity (high risk) tended to experience significantly greater improvements compared to couples without a history of infidelity (low risk) (Allen et al., 2012). There are some questions as to the meaningfulness of these improvements, however. Couples with a history of infidelity, though experiencing a greater improvement after attending the enrichment program, had lower levels of satisfaction and effective communication prior to the intervention; therefore, there was greater opportunity for significant improvement. Couples without infidelity (low risk) tended to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction both before and after the intervention in Allen et al.'s study (2012). Other researchers have classified risk through assessment of a "risk profile," including factors such as relationship satisfaction, religious attendance, parental divorce, and cohabitation (Halford, O'Donnell, Lizzio, & Wilson, 2006). In the current study, couples are classified as high risk according to their level of reported distress on the Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Low risk couples are conceptualized as 'less distressed' and are

identified by lower scores on the same scale. This classification will be used to examine Research Question 1: *How will couples' relationship satisfaction influence gains in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?*

**Gender Differences.** It appears that gender differences may exist in the frequency of reporting problems in the intimate relationship (Amato & Rogers, 1997), suggesting that partners tend to experience the relationship differently. Some research suggests women tend to report higher relationship dissatisfaction (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000), while others report no gender difference in this construct (Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Feeney, 2002; Hawkins et al., 2008). In studies examining the extent to which reported marital problems predicted divorce up to 12 years later, wives were found to report more problems in the relationship and greater relationship dissatisfaction than husbands (Amato & Rogers, 1997). It is unclear if this is reflective of actual differences in experience of these problems; it could be that females are more likely to report problems, but males experience these difficulties to the same level.

A feminist viewpoint suggests this difference may take into account the subordinate position of many women in marriage (Ferree, 1991), which includes economic dependence of the wife upon the husband. It is argued that this position leads women to work to protect this union by closely monitoring and interpreting the state of their relationship, which promotes the likelihood of being more critical than their male counterparts. Alternatively, social desirability may be contributing to bias in reports of perceived relationship satisfaction in studies where gender differences were not found. Another study indicates that men may tend to have higher levels of “unrealistic

optimism” than women (Lin & Raghubit, 2005). This characteristic is defined as “beliefs that positive (negative) events are more (less) likely to happen to one’s self versus others” (Lin & Raghubit, 2005, p. 198). This difference is hypothesized to potentially contribute to higher levels of relationship satisfaction in men. For the variable of conflict resolution, more effective methods (associated with collaboration and compromise), have been found to occur equally across males and females (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000). In general, more effective conflict management styles have been associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, for both males and females. In terms of forgiveness, gender differences have been found in about half of published research studies on this construct (Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006; Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003; Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008). When gender differences were found, females displayed greater levels of forgiveness than males (Fincham et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2008).

In regards to the influence of gender on the impact of relationship enrichment programs, it remains unclear whether gender differences exist (Allen, Stanley, Rhoades, Markman, & Loew, 2011; Duncan, Childs, & Larson, 2010; Halford, Petch, & Creedy, 2010; O’Halloran et al., 2013). Significant effect sizes have not been found when gender differences among couples attending enrichment programs were examined after completion of interventions in several studies (Allen et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2008; O’Halloran et al., 2013; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006). By contrast, a small effect size difference was found by Halford et al. (2010), who investigated the impact of two enrichment programs on couples, with women in both programs reporting higher



satisfaction than men ( $r = .17, p < .05$ ) following engagement in the intervention. In another study examining the perceived helpfulness of four different enrichment interventions, overall, women were found to report greater positive changes than men following the intervention (Duncan et al., 2010). Due to the mixed body of research in this area, the current study investigated the presence of gender differences among the four relationship variables in Research Question 2: *Do men and women differ in perceived relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?* Additionally, it aimed to examine if gender differences exist among changes in these variables for the treatment group after engaging in the intervention in Research Question 3: *Do correlations on the four study variables differ between men and women when comparing pre-, post, and follow-up?*

**Impact of Length of Marriage.** The duration of distress in relationships has been associated with likelihood of having a positive response to therapeutic intervention (Johnson & Talitman, 1997; Markman et al., 1988; Whisman & Jacobson, 1990). The longer a couple has been together, the greater the opportunity for patterns (positive and negative) to be entrenched over time and therefore become more resistant to change. Interventions to promote positive relationship patterns tend to be more successful the earlier they are introduced to the relationship (before negative patterns become engrained) (Doss, Atkins, & Christensen, 2003; Kaiser, Hahlweg, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, & Groth, 1998; Snyder, Mangrum, & Wills, 1993). Evaluation efforts tend to routinely target couples earlier in their marriage for these reasons (Halford et al., 2003), therefore less is known about how these types of programs impact couples who have been married

for longer periods of time. Additionally, much of the research on conflict resolution has focused on younger couples, with longer married couples being virtually unexamined (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000). The current research sought to explore the impact of this factor on the four study variables in Research Question 4: *Do couples who have been married for longer periods of time experience fewer statistically significant positive changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness than couples who have been married for shorter periods of time at post- and follow-up data collection compared to pre- data collection?*

**Impact of Level of Religiosity.** Religiosity has been positively associated with attendance at relationship enrichment programs (Busby, Larson, Holman, & Halford, 2015; Doss et al., 2009; McAllister, Duncan, & Busby, 2013). In fact, religiosity was found to be the most predictive factor in participation in relationship enrichment than any other demographic characteristic (i.e., length of relationship, age, children, education, or minority status) (Doss et al., 2009). In one study, among 213 couples who attended secular (not affiliated with the church or faith) relationship enrichment programs, 18% identified as “very religious,” while those who were “not at all religious” composed only 1% of this group (Doss et al., 2009). The researchers, reason these types of programs are less stigmatizing in religious versus secular communities, which promotes more religious persons’ engagement in relationship enrichment. Additionally, the authors point out that enrichment programs may be advertised to church members at religious services and thus religious individuals are exposed more to these programs than non-religious persons. In addition to participation in these types of programs, religiosity has been found to be

associated with several relationship variables, including the ones evaluated in the current research (i.e., relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, forgiveness).

Religiosity has been found to have a positive correlation with relationship satisfaction (Ahmadi & Hosseini-abadi, 2009; Larson & Olson, 2004; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney, Pargament, Jewell, Swank, Scott, Emergy, & Rye, 1999), as well as improved communication within the relationship (Mahoney et al., 1999), and reduced relationship conflict (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Fincham et al., 2008; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney et al., 1999). Lambert and Dollahite (2006) suggest that a sense of purpose and value of caring is cultivated through religious teachings, qualities which may promote improved relationship factors among those who engage with religion. Spiritual engagement has also been found to be associated with greater capacity for forgiveness towards one's partner (Fincham et al., 2008; Holeman, 2003). Holeman's (2003) qualitative study of 12 couples exploring the process of marital reconciliation supports the role of religious engagement in fostering attitudes of forgiveness. The most consistent theme in this multi-case, phenomenological study was the degree in which individuals' relationship with God was attributed to successful relationship rebuilding. It appears that religiosity influences the couple relationship in various ways. The impact of religiosity on these variables in couples attending the Weekend to Remember enrichment program is evaluated in this research in Research Question 5: *Does level of religiosity impact statistically significant positive changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at post- and follow-up data collection compared to pre- data collection?*

The current research variables, as well as the influence of gender, level of distress, and religiosity have been clarified in this portion. The remainder of this chapter will outline the faith based Weekend to Remember relationship enrichment program, followed by term definitions.

### **Overview of Weekend to Remember**

The Weekend to Remember conference is a part of the FamilyLife nonprofit organization. FamilyLife's mission is "to effectively develop godly marriages and families who change the world one home at a time" (FamilyLife, 2011). Created on the principle that society's foundation is provided by families, FamilyLife works to provide practical tools to change, empower, and strengthen families. This organization began in 1978 in response to demand from community leaders, pastors, and couples who observed value in providing seminars on marriage. Offering conferences for over 30 years, Weekend to Remember provides a two-and-a-half day opportunity for couples to step away from outside responsibilities and distractions in order to devote time and focus to the marriage relationship. The Weekend to Remember serves dating, engaged, and married couples (FamilyLife, 2011). Proposed benefits of Weekend to Remember include opportunities to discuss topics couples may not otherwise talk about that are important for developing the relationship, to learn from speakers' presentations on difficulties all couples face (as well as sharing their own personal experiences), and to acquire tools to strengthen the relationship. Couple's Projects include three projects for couples to complete during the weekend and three projects to be completed in the months following completion of the program. These projects are intended to provide couples the

opportunity to actively work on the tools as they are being taught during the weekend and facilitate continued application of these tools after it concludes. For the past decade, 25,000 to 45,000 couples have attended The Weekend to Remember each year. Scholarships are available to help facilitate the dissemination of this program to any couple who wishes to attend and to prevent access to monetary resources from prohibiting attendance.

The program is not a large counseling session and couples are not asked to participate in small groups. The program emphasizes an educational approach, where conference speakers lead couples through a manualized intervention created by FamilyLife. This consists of session lectures and related experiential activities (for couples to complete with one another outside of the conference) which teach relationship altering concepts for couples to apply in their daily lives that will strengthen their marriages. See Appendix B for the schedule of topics for Weekend to Remember. This intervention was originally created by Dennis Rainey, based upon concepts from his book *Staying Close: Stopping the Natural Drift Towards Isolation in Marriage* (2003). Dennis Rainey is a pastor who earned his degree in theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. He also holds an honorary doctorate from Trinity Evangelical University and Divinity School. Dennis Rainey helped found FamilyLife, a wholly owned subsidiary of Campus Crusade for Christ International. He currently serves as CEO and President of FamilyLife.

The manualized intervention undergoes informal evaluation and revision every four years by a FamilyLife Content Team to ensure the quality of its content and the

manner in which it is presented to couples. For example, recently, Weekend to Remember intervention was revised to add more multimedia content and shorten its overall length. The Content Team is responsible for researching issues related to families and couples. Members of the current Content Team include a Content Specialist and Manager of Counseling Resources, Review Coordinator for books and resources, and Research and Review Specialist. These individuals hold masters degrees in a variety of subjects, including, but not limited to: business, theology, and linguistics.

Conference speakers consist of two couples who have been married a minimum of 10 years. Criteria for selecting speakers include an evaluation of communication skills (i.e., must be experienced speakers, able to be vulnerable, authentic, humorous, command large audiences, be energetic, engaging, capable of clearly explaining principles and illustrations of the program without reliance on jargon or clichés) (M. Pickle, personal communication, June 17, 2013). After leaders are selected, they are required to undergo a weekend long training. A copy of the Table of Contents of this manualized training is provided in Appendix C. (The content of this training is considered proprietary information by FamilyLife, and therefore it was not released to this researcher.) After completing this training, leaders are required to attend an annual ‘Speaker’s Retreat’ each January, where “refreshers, updates, and training [are] given to the team” (M. Pickle, personal communication, June 17, 2013). At least one of the two speaker couples for each Weekend to Remember is senior team members, meaning they have already undergone evaluation and approval by the Evaluation Committee. The other couple is typically in the first two years of their commitment as leaders, which is a training period where

evaluation of their performance is required after the conclusion of each event. Prior to the last session of each Weekend to Remember, 100 critique forms (see Appendix D for an example of this form) are randomly handed out to attendees. They are asked to complete and return the critique forms before leaving the final session. Questions on the critique form ask individuals to rate the speaker on a scale of 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 10 (Outstanding) on how the material was presented and how motivated they experienced the leader to be. Additionally, respondents are asked to provide specific ways the intervention helped their marriage and any additional comments concerning the speaker and their presentations. These sheets are returned to the FamilyLife Speaker Department, where scores are tallied and open-ended responses are recorded for each leader. An average score is then determined for each speaker and shared with the couple in order to provide constructive feedback related to each event they lead. At the annual Speaker Retreat, each leader is provided a cumulative document which includes all of the information from their critique forms from the previous year. Furthermore, to ensure the manualized intervention is being followed effectively, evaluators from the FamilyLife organization attend each program and formally meet with leaders in training after observing them in four separate programs (over the course of two years). At this time, the Speaker Evaluation Committee discusses whether the leader(s) meet the following criteria:

...demonstrates excellent communication skills, able to fill conference speaker' niche with excellence, ending messages on time, successfully incorporates FamilyLife announcements and book recommendations, being a "team player", amiability with FamilyLife conference staff and local team leadership, "critique scores" of 8.7 or higher. (p. 1; FamilyLife, 2011)

If conference leaders do not meet the above criteria, they are no longer invited to be speakers for Weekend to Remember.

To date, research utilizing standardized measures and research methods on the evaluation of Weekend to Remember has not occurred. Informal evaluations of the program are conducted each year by attendees, providing face valid information on the intervention and its speakers. The popularity of the program may be attributed to familiarity with the overarching FamilyLife organization, where Weekend to Remember is housed. The current research speaks to the impact of this specific relationship enrichment program. Evidence for Weekend to Remember's impact is valuable, due to the popularity of this programs, the lack of global findings on the impact of faith based programs, and need to inform the psychological community on how this program contributes to relationship enrichment, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Relationship Satisfaction:* the perception of one's marriage along a continuum of greater or lesser favorability at a given point in time (Roach, Frazier, & Bowden, 1981).

*Communication:* a symbolic, transactional process of creating and sharing meanings (Galvin & Brommel, 2000, p. 22).

*Conflict:* an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties, who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals (Galvin & Brommel, 2000, p. 223).



*Forgiveness:* “to give up resentment of or claim to requital...to cease to feel resentment against (an offender)” (Enright et al., 2000, p. 12).

*Marriage Enrichment:* To improve and strengthen a couple (i.e., both spouses and the relationship they share) so that they can function with each other in ways that are more constructive, healthier, and more satisfying to both persons (Hunt et al., 1998, p. 14-15).

*More Distressed Couples:* For the purposes of the current study, more distressed couples are identified as those with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Lower levels of relationship satisfaction are indicated by lower scores on The Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

*Less Distressed Couples:* For the purposes of the current study, less distressed couples are identified as those with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Higher levels of relationship satisfaction are indicated by higher scores on The Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

*Religiosity:* Involves three dimensions of organizational religious activity, non-organizational religious activity, and intrinsic religiosity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

There are a wide variety of relationship enrichment programs currently available throughout the country (smartmarriages.com, 2013). Weekend to Remember, just one example of such programs, seeks to assist adult couples and individuals involved in “a serious romantic relationship” (FamilyLife, 2013, p. 1). Weekend to Remember aims to help couples improve their relationship satisfaction, strengthen communication skills, amend conflict resolution patterns, and facilitate increased forgiveness towards one’s partner (FamilyLife, 2013). This chapter will discuss methods used for the current research. Participants, study procedures, and assessments are described in detail.

#### **Study Overview**

The current study is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Weekend to Remember couples enrichment program on couples’ perceived levels of relationship satisfaction, reported communication skills, conflict management patterns, and forgiveness. It was hypothesized that couples who attend and engage in this program would demonstrate increased levels of perceived relationship satisfaction, healthy communication, healthy conflict resolution, and forgiveness towards one’s partner at both post-intervention and follow-up intervals compared to pre-intervention data collection levels than couples who did not engage in this program. This is evaluated by comparing couples’ data who had received the intervention with a wait-list control group of couples’ data who had not yet received the intervention. Additionally, evidence regarding the association between conflict resolution and forgiveness was obtained. Lastly, evidence

regarding how gender, level of distress, length of relationship, and religiosity moderate the impact of the intervention was acquired.

### **Participants**

Couples attending the Weekend to Remember during fall 2013, spring 2014, and fall 2014 were invited to participate in the current study. The study included 49 straight couples (98 individuals). To be included in the study, both members of the couple had to participate, be married, straight, read fluent English, have an email address, have access to the internet, and be at least 19 years of age. The couples were recruited through the registration process of Weekend to Remember. All couples were volunteers. There were 21 couples (42 individuals) in the wait list control group and 28 couples (56 individuals) in the treatment group.

In total, 767 individuals completed the informed consent form. Seven hundred and eighteen individuals completed the first survey. For the control group, 143 individuals completed the second survey. In all, 21 couples completed both of the control group surveys. For the treatment group, 285 individuals completed the second (post assessment) survey, and 124 individuals completed the third (follow-up) survey. In total, 28 couples completed the pre, post, and follow-up surveys and displayed engagement in Weekend to Remember. Engagement in the intervention was assessed through open ended questions in the second survey, which required participants to describe what they found most and least beneficial about the intervention. Table 1 below displays demographic information of the wait list control and treatment group couples who completed all phases of the research.

Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages of Age, Years Married, Education, Income, Race, and Location of Weekend to Remember Workshops*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
19-24 years old	4	4.1%
25-30 years old	18	18.4%
31-35 years old	20	20.4%
36-40 years old	15	15.3%
41-45 years old	10	10.2%
46-50 years old	18	18.4%
51-65 years old	13	13.3%
<b>Number of years Married</b>		
6 mths – 3 years	21	21.4%
4 – 5 years	8	8.2%
6 – 10 years	29	29.6%
11 – 15 years	20	20.4%
16 – 25 years	8	8.1%
26 – 30 years	6	6.1%
31 – 55 years	6	6.1%
<b>Highest Degree/School Completed</b>		
8th grade	1	1%
High School Diploma	6	6.1%
Some College Credit	11	11.2%
Associate Degree	9	9.2%
Bachelor's Degree	44	44.9%
Master's Degree	21	21.4%
Professional Degree (MD, DDS, JD)	3	3.1%
Doctorate Degree	2	2%
<b>Household Income</b>		
\$10,000 - \$40,000	4	4%
\$40,001 - \$50,000	8	8.2%
\$50,001 - \$60,000	19	19.4%
\$60,001 - \$70,000	12	12.2%
\$70,001 - \$80,000	12	12.2%
\$80,001 - \$100,000	12	12.2%
\$100,001 - \$150,000	17	17.3%
\$150,000 +	12	12.2%
<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0%
Black or African American	0	0%
Asian	5	5.1%

Other Pacific Islander	3	3.1%
White	88	89.8%
Hispanic or Latino	3	3.1%
Location of WTR		
Pittsburg, PA	15	15.3%
Houston, TX	14	14.3%
Cedar Rapids, IA	12	12.2%
Estes Park, CO	12	12.2%
Corpus Christi, TX	11	11.2%
Austin, TX	10	10.2%
Dallas, TX	4	4.1%
Scottsdale, AZ	4	4.1%
Burlingame, AL	4	4.1%
Orlando, FL	4	4.1%
Monterey, CA	2	2%
St. Louis, MO	2	2%
Delray Beach, FL	2	2%
Charleston, SC	2	2%

The majority of couples (77.6%) had not engaged in couples therapy prior to attending Weekend to Remember. Twelve percent of individuals had been married once previously and seven percent were married twice before their current marriage. Twenty five percent had been divorced and two percent were widowed. Three percent of couples had previously separated.

### **Instruments**

Five measures were used to assess the effectiveness of Weekend to Remember on the lived experience of individuals seeking improved intimate relationships. Demographic data regarding the attendees was also collected. The following instruments were chosen for their applicability to the curriculum of the Weekend to Remember program in order to assess the research variables.

**Couples Satisfaction Index.** The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007) is a 32 item self-report instrument designed to measure the level of

perceived relationship satisfaction for adults. An abbreviated version of the CSI was created by its authors through identification of the 4 items that yielded the greatest amount of information in the assessment of relationship satisfaction. This abbreviated version is utilized in the present study in order to reduce the amount of time required of participants to complete the questionnaire. The CSI was developed using classical test theory analysis and Item Response Theory (IRT; van der Linden & Hambleton, 1997) in an attempt to improve the precision of measurement for the construct of relationship satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007). The items are rated on 6 or 7 point scales, globally worded (i.e., “all things considered,” “in general”), and summed to yield a total score with higher scores indicative of higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Funk, 2009). Evidence of internal consistency for the full and abbreviated CSI versions are excellent, with significant Chronbach’s alphas of .98 and .94 ( $p < .001$ ) being found for the total scores, respectively (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Additionally, the CSI scales have been demonstrated to have strong convergent validity with existing relationship satisfaction measures (i.e. Dyadic Adjustment Scale/DAS, Spanier, 1976; Marital Adjustment Test/MAT, Locke & Wallace, 1959; Quality of Marriage Index/QMI, Norton, 1983; Relationship Assessment Scale/RAS, Hendrick, 1988; Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale/KMS, Schumm, Nichols, Schectman, & Grinsby, 1983; Semantic Differential/SMD, Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Communication Patterns Questionnaire/CPQ-CC, Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996; Love Attitudes Scale/LAS, Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Eysenck’s Personality Questionnaire/EPQ-N, Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) with significant positive correlations in the expected direction

ranging from  $r = .87$  to  $.96$  ( $p < .001$ ) (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Given the strong psychometric qualities of the instrument and compelling evidence of its superior precision (reduced noise in measurement) over other well-validated self-report measures of relationship satisfaction, the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), the current study utilized this instrument to measure the construct of relationship satisfaction.

**A Marital Communication Inventory.** A Marital Communication Inventory is designed to assess the process of communication as an element of marital interaction (Bienvenu, 1970). It does not measure the content of communication, but rather the process, patterns, characteristics, and styles of communication (i.e., “the couple’s ability to listen, to understand each other, to express themselves, and their manner of saying things” Bienvenu, 1970, p. 27). It is a self-report inventory with 46 items. The author created an abbreviated form of this assessment using the 20 items found to discriminate most powerfully at the  $p < .001$  level. The abbreviated form is utilized in the present study for the sake of brevity. These items provide information regarding the destructive nature of the couples’ communication, the tone of the verbal exchanges, how emotions are dealt with, and the way messages are received and transmitted. Respondents answer on a four-point scale ranging from ‘usually’ to ‘never’. Higher scores are indicative of a greater tendency to communicate positively with one’s partner. The instrument defines communication as “how people exchange feelings and meanings as they try to understand one another and come to see problems and differences from the other person’s point of view” (Bienvenu, 1970, p. 26). The development of items was based upon the

conceptualization that communication is not limited to verbal exchange, but also occurs through “listening, silences, facial expressions, gestures, touch”, etc. (Bienvenu, 1970, p. 27). Split-half reliability was assessed using the Spearman-Brown Correction formula on the odd and even-numbered items of the inventory. A coefficient of .93 was found after correction, indicating high split-half reliability of the measure. Additionally, reports of test-retest estimates range from .92 for five week testing intervals and .94 for two month testing intervals. Discriminant validity for the scale suggests that 45 of the 46 items discriminate at the  $p < .01$  level between the upper and lower quartiles of their experimental group ( $N = 344$ ), with the remaining item discriminating at the  $p < .05$  level. Relatedly, in other studies ( $N = 46$ ,  $N = 210$ ,  $N = 322$ ), a significant difference in marital communication was found between couples with no intrusive relationship problems and couples receiving counseling for their relationship (Bienvenu, 1970). Because of the strong psychometric qualities of A Marital Communication Inventory, the current study utilized this instrument to measure the construct of relationship communication.

**Ineffective Arguing Inventory.** The Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI, Kurdek, 1994) is an 8-item self-report measure that is used to assess “the extent to which couple members perceive that they and their partners engage in a pattern of arguing that has been linked to adverse couple functioning” (Kurdek, 1994, p. 717). The development of the IAI is based on the conceptual theory of characterizing “ineffective arguing” as a global, unidimensional couple interactional pattern (Kurdek, 1994). Development of items was based upon conceptualization of negative interactional patterns being repetitive,



arguments ending without sense of resolution, arguments ending with one or neither partners feeling they were given a fair hearing, and knowing how the argument will end before it is over (Kurdek, 1994). Individuals are asked to circle the number on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Disagree Strongly) to 5 (Agree Strongly) which indicates how much they agree with the corresponding statement as applied to their relationship. The IAI is scored by summing the items, with higher total scores indicative of perceived poorer conflict resolution in the couple relationship. Three items (1, 3, 8) are reverse scored. Reliability and Validity evidence for the IAI are evidence of the strength of its psychometric properties.

Internal consistency for the IAI has been found to be high, with coefficient alpha ranges from .86-.89 when completed by gay, lesbian, and straight couples (Kurdek, 1994). Evidence for test-retest reliability was found to be moderate with a one year interval between administration ( $r = .63$  to  $.84$ ) with the same populations (Kurdek, 1994). Support for validity has also been found for the IAI through predictive and concurrent validity assessment. Both relationship members' IAI scores were found to be positively correlated ( $r = .55$  for straight couples,  $p < .01$ ), indicating the same couple-level construct is being tapped by the items on the measure (Kurdek, 1994). Concurrent validity evidence has been found between individual total scores and global relationship satisfaction (as measured by the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale) (Kurdek, 1994). In all cases, as expected, couple members with higher IAI scores (indicating frequent ineffective arguing) also reported lower relationship satisfaction than couple members with lower IAI scores ( $r = -.62$  to  $-.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The

IAI was also found to predict change in relationship satisfaction between the first administration and second administration, occurring one year later (Kurdek, 1994). The difference in global relationship satisfaction scores between first and second administrations was from -10 to 14 ( $M = -.44$ ,  $SD = 3.26$ ) for husbands and from -8 to 14 ( $M = -.01$ ,  $SD = 3.46$ ) for wives. Again, in each case, higher first administration IAI scores were predictive of decreases in second administration relationship satisfaction scores. Relatedly, relationship dissatisfaction was also found to be predicted by higher IAI scores. All point-biserial correlations between IAI scores and relationship status (0 = not dissolved, 1 = dissolved) were moderately significant and positive (ranging from  $r = .18$  to  $.41$ ), indicating higher levels of perceived ineffective arguing predicted relationship dissolution (Kurdek, 1994). Given this evidence for the strong psychometric qualities of the IAI, the current study utilized this instrument to measure the construct of conflict resolution.

**Enright Forgiveness Inventory.** The Enright Forgiveness Inventory assesses the “degree to which one person forgives another who has hurt him or her deeply and unfairly” (Enright et al., 2000, p. 5) in young adolescents and adults. It is composed of 60 self-report items, each on a 1 to 6 point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree). Positively and negatively worded items are placed randomly in each subscale: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive subscale, comprised of 20 items, is used in the present research. According to the authors, the cognitive subscale provides insight into thoughts which in turn influence the respondents’ attitudes and behaviors, and therefore can be used to detect subtle initial changes in forgiveness (Enright et al.,

2000). Items are a word or short phrase describing the respondent's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors towards the offending person (i.e., romantic partner). Interpersonal forgiveness is defined by EFI authors as "a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her" (Enright et al., 2000, p. 1). The word 'forgiveness' is not used in any of the items, for the purpose of preventing the creation of conceptual bias when responding. Relatedly, in administration, the EFI is referenced as an 'attitude scale' in order to prevent the same answering bias. Respondents are asked to report their current thoughts, as opposed to thoughts they have had in the past.

Internal consistency is strong for the cognitive subscale of the EFI, with Cronbach's Alphas ranging from .97 - .98 for the standardization sample of high school students, college students, and adults (Enright et al., 2000). The test-retest reliability coefficient for the total cognition scale score was .91 when administered for the second time four weeks after the initial administration. Construct validity evidence was found among strong positive correlations between all subscales and total score ( $r = .71 - .81$ ) to another measure of forgiveness, the Wade Forgiveness Scale (Wade, 1989) (Enright et al., 2000). Discriminant validity evidence was also found, as the EFI was significantly negatively correlated ( $r = -.15$  to  $-.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ) with measures of anxiety, depression, and anger (i.e., Spielberger's State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, Spielberger & Gorsuch, 1983; Beck Depression Inventory, Beck & Steer, 1987; State Anger Scale, Spielberger & Gorsuch, 1983) (Enright et al., 2000). Given this support for the strong psychometric

qualities of the EFI, the current study utilized this instrument to measure the construct of forgiveness.

**Duke University Religion Index.** An individual's level of religiosity has been assessed by researchers in several ways. Some researchers (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Doss et al., 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999) measure religiosity with rating scale questions created by the authors, such as "All things considered, how religious would you say that you are?" (Doss et al., 2009, p. 20). Other researchers utilize questionnaires to quantify religiosity (Ahmadi & Hosseini-abadi, 2009; Larson & Olson, 2004) or purposive sampling through referrals from religious leaders (they identified members of their communities whom they considered to be highly involved) (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). For the purposes of this study, the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL, Koenig & Büssing, 2010) is utilized to assess this construct.

The Duke University Religion Index (DUREL, Koenig & Büssing, 2010) is a five item measure of religiosity. According to the instrument creators, there are three major dimensions of religiosity: organizational religious activity, non-organizational religious activity, and intrinsic religiosity/subjective religiosity. Organizational religious activity consists of public religious activities (e.g., attending religious services, participating in a prayer group or scripture study group). Non-organizational religious activity involves religious activities performed in private (e.g., prayer, scripture study, watching or listening to religious television or audio programming). Intrinsic religiosity is defined as the "degree of personal religious commitment or motivation" (Koenig & Büssing, 2010, p. 80). This instrument assesses these three domains in separate subscales. Scores range

from 5 to 27, with higher scores indicative of greater levels of religiosity. The overall scale has demonstrated high test-retest reliability (intra-class correlation = .91) and high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha's range from .78 to .91) (Koenig & Büssing, 2010). Strong evidence of convergent validity ( $r$ 's = .71-.86) has been found between the DUREL and established measures of religiosity (i.e., Dean Hoge's 10-item Intrinsic Religiosity Scale, Hoge, 1972; Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire—Short Form, Plante, Vallays, Sherman, & Wallston, 2002) (Koenig & Büssing, 2010). Because of this evidence in support of the psychometric strength of the DUREL, it was used in the current research to assess the construct of religiosity.

## **Procedures**

Prior to beginning recruitment for this research, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained (Appendix E). After receiving approval for the study from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln's IRB, a "prenotice letter" (Appendix F) was emailed to individuals by the FamilyLife organization following their online registration for the Weekend to Remember conference. A prenotice letter is intended to provide the participant with notice that they will be receiving a request for their help with research (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Research suggests that response rates can be improved by 3 to 6 percent when a prenotice letter is sent to potential participants (Dillman, Clark, & Sinclair, 1995; Dillman et al., 2009). Outlined in this invitation was a structure of incentives provided by FamilyLife to research participants. Individuals were sent *Moments Together for Couples* (Rainey & Rainey, 1995), a spiritual devotional for couples (valued at approximately \$14 retail) after completing their second survey.

Women and men in the treatment group also received a copy of *For Women Only: What you Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men* (Feldhahn, 2004) or *For Men Only: A Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women* (Feldhahn & Feldhahn, 2006), respectively, following completion of their third survey. These books (each valued at approximately \$12 retail) provide insights regarding the gender related needs and characteristics of men and women. Additionally, at the conclusion of data collection, individuals who completed all phases of the research were entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Amazon online gift card. According to Dillman et al. (2009), offering incentives promotes responding slightly more than not offering incentives. Meta-analyses by Göritz (2006), found response rates to increase by an average of 4.2 percent when material incentives are offered to research participants.

Two days after sending the prenotice letter, participants were emailed a research description, informed consent form, and questionnaire link. Dillman et al. (2009) advise the prenotice letter be sent a couple of days to a week prior to the actual questionnaire for optimal response rates. If individuals chose to participate in the research, they indicated on the informed consent by checking a box next to their electronic signature that they consent to be emailed the questionnaire link. They also provided their spouse's email address to be sent their own informed consent form, description of the research, and questionnaire link. Their spouse was then emailed the prenotice letter, followed by the informed consent, research description, and questionnaire link email two days later. The research description, included in the consent form, provided an overview of the study, including the purpose of the research, requirements of participation, time commitment

required to participate, incentives, and potential benefits and risks to participating. How their completion of the instruments would assist in the continued success of the Weekend to Remember program and provide valuable information to the field of faith based enrichment research was emphasized. They were also asked to complete the instruments without consultation with their spouse, within one week of receiving the email containing the assessment link. These instructions accompanied each set of questionnaires. Along with the questionnaire link, participants were provided with their own unique code to enter when completing their questionnaire. This code served to connect spouse's responses, so that no identifying information would be utilized to link individuals' responses. This unique code was used each time participants filled out a questionnaire. The participants were informed that their information would be kept confidential by both FamilyLife and the primary investigator, and that they have the right to decline or withdraw from participating in the study at any time without penalty. Additionally, the informed consent explained the benefits of the current study to the Weekend to Remember, FamilyLife, and this researcher. Lastly, prospective participants were advised that they may contact the primary investigator, Family Life, and/or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board with any questions about the study. After each individual provided informed consent, the demographic form and survey instruments were emailed to them via Qualtrics software.

Registration for the Weekend to Remember was open to attendees from months prior to the conference dates up to and including the day of the conference. Couples are required to register for the enrichment program, but due to the open timing of this

process, this occurred at varying periods of time prior to couples attending the program. Assessment data was collected immediately after all individuals registered and completed the informed consent, as described above. They were instructed to complete the instruments individually, without consultation with their partner. As described above, each member of the couple separately received all research related emails at their own email address, which they provided to researchers and consented for use in the research. A thank you/reminder email (see Appendix G) was sent four days after the questionnaire link email, expressing appreciation for responding and indicating that if the questionnaires were not yet completed it was hoped that it will be completed soon. Research indicates that most respondents complete questionnaires almost immediately after receiving them (Dillman et al., 2009). After two to three days, response rates decrease sharply.

Those who fail to answer the questionnaire immediately likely do so less because of conscious refusal than because of unrealized good intentions or the lack of any reaction at all...as each day passes, it becomes a lower priority until it is completely forgotten. (Dillman et al., 2009, p. 250)

Therefore, a few days is suggested as the optimal interval between reminder emails. It jogs the memories of individuals who have yet to respond by conveying a sense of importance without appearing impatient or nagging. Also of note, all emails were delivered in the mornings. Research has shown that study invitations are most successful when sent during this time, as opposed to later in the day (Trouteaud, 2004). Researchers suggest this is due to competing demands placed upon individuals as the day progresses.



In the morning, respondents are most likely to first check their email and be able to respond before other priorities get in the way.

As stated previously, couples are able to register for their respective conference months to hours before attending their Weekend to Remember. A wait list control group was created, using individuals who completed their initial questionnaire one month or more prior to their scheduled conference. These individuals were emailed their second (and final) set of questionnaires one week prior to their scheduled conference. Included with the questionnaire link were instructions to complete their assessments alone, without consultation with their spouse. They were again sent a thank you/reminder email four days after the questionnaire link was delivered to promote response rate. Those not in the control group were included in the treatment group. These participants were emailed their post conference questionnaire link the Monday morning following their scheduled Weekend to Remember. A thank you/reminder email was delivered four days later. Lastly, a follow-up questionnaire link was emailed eight weeks after couples engaged in their conference, with a thank you/reminder email delivered four days later. Data was collected between May 2014 and February 2015.

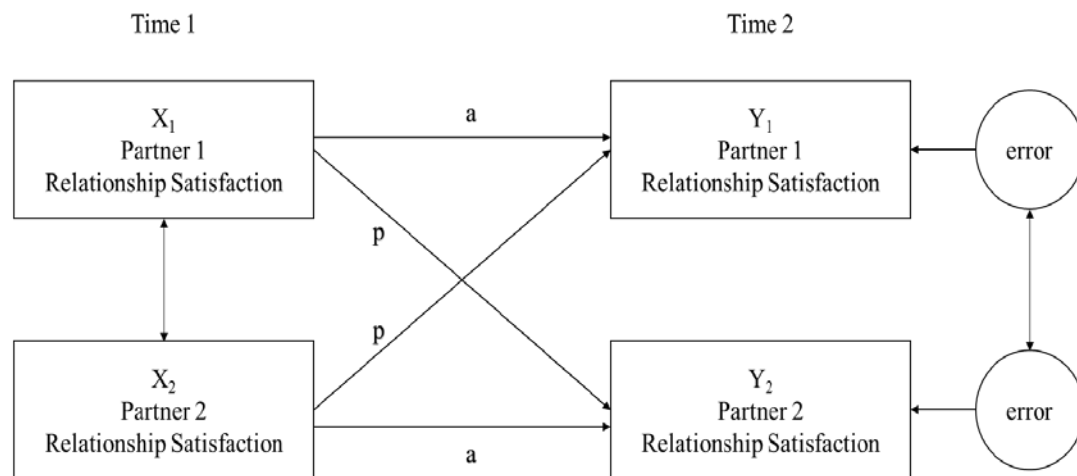
### **Analyses**

Data was collected and recorded using Qualtrics, an online survey system. Items from each of the five instruments were entered into this system. As previously described, each participant in the treatment group was emailed a questionnaire link and thank you/reminder email at pre-, post-, and follow-up. Each participant in the wait list control group was emailed a questionnaire link and thank you/reminder email immediately

following registering for the conference and again one week prior to their scheduled conference. The Qualtrics online system stored the responses, as well as the date and time that the questionnaires were completed.

Following the completion of data collection, the data was transferred to SPSS for data analysis. The data was analyzed using several different methods. Data was analyzed for several of the research questions/hypotheses using the couple as the unit of analysis rather than the individual members of the couple. This was accomplished by utilizing the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 1999). This method is based upon the notion that data from the individual members of the couple are not independent of one another, but rather, are influenced by and influence one another. According to Cook and Kenny (2005), “A consequence of interdependence is that observations of two individuals are linked or correlated such that knowledge of one person’s score provides information about the other person’s score” (p. 101). APIM calculates “actor effects,” which represents how one individual’s score influences a variable, and “partner effects,” which represents how that individual’s score on this variable influences the second individual’s score on the same variable (Butler, Egloff, Wilhelm, Smith, Erickson, & Gross, (2003). See Figure 1 below which depicts the APIM model. The actor (a) and partner (b) effects are the direct effects of independent variables (actor =  $X_1$  and partner =  $X_2$ ) upon dependent variables (actor =  $Y_1$  and partner =  $Y_2$ ). The interaction effects (p) are the effects of combinations of independent variables on the dependent variables.

Figure 1. APIM Model



The interdependence effect is the representation of the extent of one person's/actor's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors upon the thoughts, feelings, or behaviors of another person/partner. Interactional models (otherwise known as goodness of fit models), describe how outcomes are impacted by characteristics of two persons. This model has been used in studies of emotion, communication competence, and attachment style, and has been recommended for research evaluating outcomes in couples interventions (Cook & Kenny, 2005). This interdependence is determined through measuring associations between data of members in the dyad. This association will be conducted by utilizing Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), which creates models that nest this non-independent data at multiple levels. The corresponding method to be utilized for each research hypothesis and question is described below:

H1: Couples will achieve statistically significant positive changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness after attending the program compared to the wait list control group.

This hypothesis was examined using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM), a form of Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM).

H2: Treatment group gains will be maintained at statistically significantly higher levels at follow-up assessment compared to pre-treatment assessment.

This hypothesis was examined using a within groups ANOVA.

H3: Forgiveness will be statistically significantly associated with better conflict resolution at pre, post, and follow-up assessment.

This hypothesis was examined using correlations between pre- and post- and pre- and follow-up data. Effect size was analyzed by examining the size and direction of Pearson's  $r$ .

Q1: How will couples' relationship satisfaction influence gains in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?

This research question was analyzed using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model/Hierarchical Linear Modeling.

Q2: Do men and women differ in perceived relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?

This research question was analyzed using an independent samples T-test with gender as the grouping variable.

Q3: Do correlations on the four study variables differ between men and women when comparing pre-, post, and follow-up?

This research question was analyzed using correlations between pre- and post- and pre- and follow-up data. Effect size was analyzed by examining the size and direction of Pearson's  $r$ .

Q4: Do couples who have been married for longer periods of time experience fewer statistically significant positive changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness than couples who have been married for shorter periods of time at post- and follow-up data collection compared to pre- data collection?

This research question was analyzed using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model/Hierarchical Linear Modeling. The difference between pre- and post- scores on each of the dependent variables and using time being married to predict those scores was examined.

Q5: Does level of religiosity impact statistically significant positive changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at post- and follow-up data collection compared to pre-data collection?

This research question was analyzed using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model/Hierarchical Linear Modeling. The difference between pre- and post- scores on

each of the dependent variables and using religiosity to predict those scores was examined.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The present study used a longitudinal and correlational design to observe changes in participants after engaging in the Weekend to Remember relationship enrichment program. Analyses involved repeated measurement of the same subjects in a treatment group compared to a wait list control group. The wait list control group completed the survey at two time points and the treatment group completed the survey at three time points. Analyses also examined the relationship between demographic and study variables. The demographic variables examined included gender and length of marriage. The study variables were relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Both the couple and each individual of the couple were the units of analysis. To assess whether the intervention had the hypothesized effects, a multi group comparison design with actor—partner interdependence analysis was utilized. The actor partner interdependence analysis is a method of analysis which uses the couple as a unit of change over time. This is a multivariate design where actor, partner, and interaction effects were examined. Based on the hypotheses and research questions that were posed, the interaction effect was first analyzed. The interaction effect allowed the effect of the couple rather than individuals within the couple to be examined. Since most of the hypotheses and research questions focused on the couple rather than individuals, the interaction effect rather than the actor and partner effects were assessed. As such, interaction effects were the effects of interest in the present study. The interaction effects are the effects of combinations of independent variables on the dependent variables.

Interactional models (otherwise known as goodness of fit models), describe how outcomes are impacted by characteristics of two persons. The interaction effect assesses whether the overall model was significant (i.e., whether or not couples differed from one another rather than whether individuals differed from one another). Due to lack of diversity in the sample, it was not necessary to control for demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education, socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation). Frequencies and percentages of these demographic variables are presented in Chapter 3, in Table 1. See Table 2 below for number of participants, mean, and standard deviations for each study variable at each time point for the control and treatment groups. See Table 3 for comparisons of means between treatment and control groups at time 1 using ANOVA for all study variables (i.e., religiosity, relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, forgiveness). No findings from the ANOVA were statistically significant ( $F$  range: .60 – 3.03,  $p$  range: .09 – .44). The control and treatment groups were not significantly different from one another at pre assessment for any of the study variables.

Table 2

*Sample Size, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Study Variables at each Time Point for Control and Treatment Groups*

Variables & Groups	Time	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation
Religiosity Control	1	42	4.80	3.00	5.40	.59
Religiosity Tx	1	55	4.85	2.60	5.40	.57
Rel Sat Control	1	41	4.71	1.00	6.25	1.23
	2	42	4.76	2.00	6.25	1.23
Rel Sat Tx	1	55	5.00	3.25	6.25	.81
	2	56	5.26	3.25	6.25	.74
	3	56	5.18	3.25	6.25	.80
Com Control	1	41	2.27	1.32	2.95	.39
	2	42	2.96	1.74	3.95	.59
Com Tx	1	55	2.33	1.58	3.00	.36
	2	56	3.14	2.32	3.95	.44
	3	55	3.18	2.21	3.95	.47
Conflict Control	1	41	2.70	1.00	4.75	.97
	2	42	2.62	1.00	4.88	1.10
Conflict Tx	1	55	2.36	1.00	4.25	.95
	2	56	2.13	1.00	4.25	.89
	3	56	2.10	1.00	3.88	.80
Forgive Control	1	41	1.16	1.00	1.75	.22
	2	42	1.20	1.00	2.05	.28
Forgive Tx	1	55	1.10	1.00	1.65	.14
	2	56	1.07	1.00	1.40	.11
	3	56	1.08	1.00	1.70	.14

*Note.*

Tx = Treatment Group, Rel Sat = Relationship Satisfaction, Com = Communication, Conflict = Conflict Resolution, Forgive = Forgiveness, Time 1 = Pre Assessment, Time 2 = Post Assessment, Time 3 = Follow-Up Assessment

Religiosity was assessed using the Duke University Religion Index (Koenig & Büssing, 2010)

Relationship Satisfaction was assessed using the Couples Satisfaction Index-4 (Funk & Rogge, 2007)

Communication was assessed using A Marital Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1970)

Conflict Resolution was assessed using the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (Kurdek, 1994)

Forgiveness was assessed using the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Enright et al., 2000).



Table 3

*Comparison of Means Between Treatment and Control Groups at Time 1*

Variable	N	df	F	p
Religiosity	97	1	.67	.42
Relationship Satisfaction	96	1	2.02	.16
Communication	96	1	.60	.44
Conflict Resolution	96	1	2.92	.09
Forgiveness	96	1	3.03	.09

### **Hypothesis 1**

The first hypothesis predicted that couples who engaged in the intervention would have significant improvements in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at post intervention compared to the wait list control group at time 2. Time was the within subjects independent variable for Hypothesis 1, with dependent variables of relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. A multi group comparison design was used to assess this hypothesis. Essentially, the multi group comparison design was used to determine which parameters of the APIM model were dissimilar across treatment and control groups. Specifically, it was of interest to set all actor and partner effects equal across treatment and control groups, then to set all actor and partner effects as different across treatment and control groups. Multiple statistical models were created which examined the parameters across groups. To show which model fit better, a Chi Square difference test was used. The Chi Square analysis detected whether significant differences exist between the treatment and control group at time 2. Whether there were mean differences between the treatment and control group in the study variables was also of interest.

In Model 1, the partner effect and actor effect (the interaction effect) was assumed to be equal between the treatment and control groups. In Model 2, the partner effect and the actor effect (the interaction effect) was not assumed to be equal between the treatment and control groups. Although the APIM model does not specifically examine mean differences, it assumes that means differ across groups. To test whether this assumption was correct, a third model was created (Model 3) that was equal to Model 2, except within that model it was assumed that there were no significant mean differences between the treatment and control group. This model, when compared to Model 2, allowed assessment of whether means changed across time between the treatment and control groups. The model comparison between Models 2 and 3 was the focus of this analysis, since the current research was specifically interested in whether means changed across time for the treatment group compared to the control group. Actor and partner effects were not examined separately, but as a whole (the interaction effect). Models were each compared using chi-square difference tests. Table 4 shows the model fit indices and examines model comparisons. A non-significant  $p$  value indicates that the model and data did not differ significantly, which means that the model fit well. The  $p_{\text{difference}}$  is the chi-square difference  $p$  value. If there is a significant  $p_{\text{difference}}$  value, then the model that was most parsimonious (i.e., the model with less degrees of freedom) was considered to be the best fit. If there was a non-significant  $p_{\text{difference}}$  value, then the model that allowed for more difference (i.e., the model with more degrees of freedom) was considered to be the best fit. If the model had a chi-square value of 0, this means the model was saturated, indicating that there were no testable hypotheses within that model. In these cases, these

models were not compared with other models in the analysis, and thus could not be the best fitting model.

For relationship satisfaction, confident interpretation of the analysis was not able to be made. Chi square information for each model is presented in Table 4 below. The original analysis (Model 1) assumed that the treatment and control groups were equal at time 1. This model assumed the partner effect and actor effect (the interaction effect) was equal between treatment and control groups. A modified version of Model 1, which assumed correlations at time 1 were not equal across groups, was used due to the groups being empirically incomparable. This modification was applied to Models 2 and 3, as well, so that these models could be compared. None of the three models fit well, but the modified Model 3 fit the best ( $\chi^2 = 9.86$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = .28$ ). This lack of fit was attributed to the control ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and treatment group couples ( $M = 5$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) being statistically significantly different from one another in terms of relationship satisfaction at pre-assessment. The correlation between partner 1 and partner 2 at time 1 for the control group ( $r = .82$ ) was significantly different from the correlation between partner 1 and partner 2 at time 1 for the treatment group ( $r = .48$ ); meaning, the treatment and control group couples were not empirically comparable for the variable of relationship satisfaction. Because the treatment and control group couples were significantly different at pre-assessment, all interpretations of relationship satisfaction change due to the intervention must be made with caution. Because the treatment and control group couples were significantly different from one another at time 1, clear

conclusions regarding Weekend to Remember's impact upon relationship satisfaction cannot be made.

For communication, no significant mean differences were found. Chi square information for each model is presented in Table 4. Model 3 was the best fit (chi-square = 6.91,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .08$ ). Since this model fit the best, it is concluded that there were no significant mean differences between the treatment ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .44$ ) and control groups ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) for the variable of communication at time 2. The interaction effect (between the partner effect and actor effect) was significant, but the treatment and control group means were not significantly different from one another. Couples who engaged in the Weekend to Remember intervention did not experience significant changes in communication compared with those who did not engage in the program.

For conflict resolution, significant mean differences between the treatment ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) and control group ( $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) were found at time 2. Chi square information for each model can be found in Table 4 below. Model 2 fit the best (chi-square = 0,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .99$ ). Since this model fit the best, it is concluded that the interaction effect (between the partner effect and the actor effect) was significant for the treatment compared to the control groups. This means the treatment had a significant effect on the level of conflict resolution between the two groups. Couples who engaged in Weekend to Remember experienced significant improvements in conflict resolution compared with those who did not engage in the program.

For forgiveness, the data were not able to be interpreted with confidence due to extreme skewness, therefore no conclusions were able to be drawn. Chi square

information for each model is presented in Table 4 below. Model 2 fit the best (chi-square = 4.36,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .04$ ). Although this model did not completely fit, it fit the best out of all estimated models. A non-significant  $p$  value indicates that the model and data did not differ significantly, which means that the model fits well. Essentially, there was a mismatch between the data and the model. When a model is created, it should match the data as best as possible. The reason for this lack of fit is attributed to significant skewness of this variable. The interaction effect (between the partner effect and the actor effect) was not equal between the treatment and control groups. The intervention had an effect on the level of forgiveness between the treatment ( $M = 1.07$ ,  $SD = .11$ ), and control group ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = .28$ ) at time 2. However, because of the significant skewness, this analysis requires caution in its interpretation. While couples who engaged in the Weekend to Remember intervention experienced significant changes in forgiveness compared with those who did not engage in the program, because the data was severely skewed even after substantial transformation, clear conclusions regarding Weekend to Remember's impact upon forgiveness cannot be made.

Table 4

*Model Comparison Chi Square and Significance Results for Models 1, 2, & 3*

Variable	Model	Chi Square	df	p	Model Comparison	p <sub>difference</sub>
Relationship Satisfaction						
	1	11.20	5	.05	—	—
	1a**	2.73	4	.60	M1 & M1a	.00
	2a**	0	0	.00	M1a & M2a	n/a
	3a**	9.86	8	.28	M1a & M3a	.13
Communication						
	1	9.85	4	.04	—	—
	2	1.87	1	.17	M1 & M2	.04
	3	6.91	3	.07	M2 & M3	.08
Conflict						
	1	9.65	4	.05	—	.33
	2	0	1	.99	M1 & M2	.03
	3	9.71	3	.02	M2 & M3	.01
Forgiveness						
	1	180.99	4	.00	—	—
	2	4.36	1	.04	M1 & M2	.00
	3	15.93	3	.00	M2 & M3	.00

Note. N = 56.

\*\**Modified Version*

If there is a significant p<sub>difference</sub> value, then the model that was most parsimonious (e.g., the model with less df) was considered to be the best fit. If there was a non-significant p<sub>difference</sub> value, then the model that allowed for more difference (e.g., the model with more df) was considered to be the best fit. If the model had a chi-square value of 0, this means the model was saturated, indicating that there are no testable hypotheses within that model.

## Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis predicted that treatment gains for the variables of relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness would be maintained at statistically significant higher levels at eight week follow-up compared to pre-treatment assessment for the treatment group. Time was the within subjects independent variable for this hypothesis, with dependent variables of relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. This hypothesis was examined using a within groups ANOVA. Bonferroni post hoc analyses were used for adjustment for comparison between groups. Since the data were slightly skewed, the Greenhouse-Geisser statistic is reported for all variable analyses. Pairwise comparisons between each of the time points and the respective significance of each difference is presented in Table 5.

For relationship satisfaction, results indicated  $F = 3.29, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$ . The mean difference between time 1 (pre assessment;  $M = 5.00, SD = .81$ ) and time 2 (post assessment;  $M = 5.26, SD = .74$ ) was significant in the expected direction,  $\bar{x}_{\text{diff}} = .25, p < .05$ . This comparison demonstrates a significant time effect from T1 to T2 for the treatment group. The mean difference between time 2 and time 3 (follow-up assessment;  $M = 5.18, SD = .80$ ) was non-significant, but showed a slight decrease in relationship satisfaction  $\bar{x}_{\text{diff}} = -.06, p > .05$ . This indicates that from post-treatment to follow-up the gains that were made over time slightly decreased. Additionally, the comparison between T1 & T3 was non-significant ( $\bar{x}_{\text{diff}} = .19, p = .24$ ), therefore the gains in relationship satisfaction from T1 to T2 were not maintained into T3. Relationship satisfaction

significantly improved over time for those who engaged in Weekend to Remember; however, these gains were not maintained eight weeks following engagement in the intervention.

For communication, results from the repeated measures ANOVA yielded  $F = 303.49, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .85$ . The mean difference between time 1 ( $M = 2.33, SD = .36$ ) and time 2 ( $M = 3.14, SD = .44$ ) was significant in the expected direction,  $\bar{x}_{\text{diff}} = .80, p < .05$ . The mean difference between time 2 and time 3 ( $M = 3.18, SD = .47$ ) was non-significant, with a slight increase in the expected direction,  $\bar{x}_{\text{diff}} = .05, p = .77$ . Communication significantly improved over time for those in the treatment group and this gain was maintained eight weeks following engagement in the intervention.

For conflict resolution, results of the repeated measures ANOVA revealed  $F = 7.51, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .12$ . The mean difference between time 1 ( $M = 2.36, SD = .95$ ) and time 2 ( $M = 2.13, SD = .89$ ) was significant in the expected direction,  $\bar{x}_{\text{diff}} = .22, p < .05$ . (Higher scores on the Ineffective Arguing Inventory reflect poorer conflict management; therefore decreases in this variable are indicative of improvement in conflict resolution.) The mean difference between time 2 and time 3 ( $M = 2.10, SD = .80$ ) was non-significant, with a slight decrease in the expected direction of  $\bar{x}_{\text{diff}} = .07, p > .05$ . Conflict resolution significantly improved over time and this gain was maintained eight weeks following engagement in the intervention.

For forgiveness, results of the repeated measures ANOVA yielded  $F = .36, p = .69$ . The mean difference between time 1 ( $M = 1.10, SD = .14$ ) and time 2 ( $M = 1.07, SD = .11$ ) was non-significant, as well as the mean difference between time 2 and time 3 ( $M$



= 1.08,  $SD = .14$ ). Forgiveness did not significantly improve over time for the treatment group and therefore conclusions regarding the maintenance of changes cannot be made.

Table 5

*Time 1 – Time 2, Time 2 – Time 3, Time 1 – Time 3 Comparisons of Means for Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness*

Variable	Pre Tx to Post Tx Change		Post Tx to Follow-Up Change		Pre Tx to Follow-Up Change	
	$\bar{x}_{diff}$	p	$\bar{x}_{diff}$	p	$\bar{x}_{diff}$	p
Relationship Satisfaction	.25	.03	-.06	1.00	.19	.24
Communication	.80	.00	.05	.77	-.85	.77
Conflict Resolution	-.22	.01	-.08	1.00	.29	.00
<b>Forgiveness</b>	<b>-.02</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>.01</b>	<b>1.00</b>

Note. N = 56.

Pre = Pre Assessment, Post = Post Assessment, Follow-Up = Follow-Up Assessment, Tx = Treatment.

### Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis predicted that higher levels of forgiveness would be significantly associated with lower levels of conflict resolution at pre, post, and follow-up assessment for the treatment group. (Lower levels of conflict resolution are indicative of better conflict resolution skills.) Time was the within subjects independent variable for this hypothesis. The relationship between the two variables of forgiveness and conflict resolution was examined using correlations between the variables at pre, post, and follow-up assessment. These correlations are presented in Table 6 below. The effect sizes were analyzed by examining the size and direction of Pearson's  $r$ .

At pre assessment, forgiveness ( $M = 1.10$ ,  $SD = .14$ ) and conflict resolution ( $M = 2.36$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) were significantly associated at  $r = .514$ ,  $p < .001$ . At post assessment, forgiveness ( $M = 1.07$ ,  $SD = .11$ ) and conflict resolution ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) were not

significantly associated at  $r = .18$ ,  $p = .18$ . At follow-up assessment, forgiveness ( $M = 1.08$ ,  $SD = .14$ ) and conflict resolution ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) were significantly associated at  $r = .45$ ,  $p = .001$ . All significant correlations were in the expected direction. Higher levels of forgiveness were significantly associated with lower levels of conflict resolution (i.e., better conflict resolution) and lower levels of forgiveness were significantly associated with higher levels of conflict resolution (i.e., poorer conflict resolution) before attending the intervention and eight weeks after the intervention, but not directly following engagement in Weekend to Remember.

Table 6

*Correlations Between Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution at Pre, Post, and Follow-Up Assessment*

	<b>T1 FG</b>	<b>T1 CR</b>	<b>T2 FG</b>	<b>T2 CR</b>	<b>T3 FG</b>	<b>T3 CR</b>
T1 FG	—					
T1 CR	.51**	—				
T2 FG	.10	.04	—			
T2 CR	.29*	.83**	.18	—		
T3 FG	.46**	.34*	.38**	.34*	—	
<b>T3 CR</b>	<b>.32*</b>	<b>.79**</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.73**</b>	<b>.45**</b>	—

*Note.* N = 56. FG = Forgiveness, CR = Conflict Resolution, T1 = Pre Assessment, T2 = Post Assessment, T3 = Follow-up Assessment. \*\* Significant at .01 level (2-tailed). \* Significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

### Research Question 1

The first research question asked how couples' levels of relationship satisfaction upon entering the intervention (pre assessment) would influence gains in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. For this question, the between subjects independent variable was relationship satisfaction at pre intervention for the treatment group, and the within subjects independent variable was time (pre and post intervention). The dependent variables were communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Two models were tested. In pre analysis, paths were found to be not equal across groups. In Model 1, no significant interaction effects, partner main effects, or actor main effects were assumed between the treatment and control groups. In Model 2, interaction effects, partner effects, and actor effects were assumed to be equal. Actor and partner means were assumed to not be equal in both models since this question did not require examining mean differences. A multi group comparison design was used to assess this hypothesis. A Chi Square difference test was used to detect whether relationship satisfaction significantly predicted changes in conflict resolution, communication, and forgiveness for the treatment group. Model comparisons are used to assess which model fit the best.

For the variable of communication, Model 2 was the best fit with a Chi square = 13.08 ( $df = 5$ ),  $p = 0.02$ . Chi square information for each model is presented in Table 7 below. This model indicates that across time, the interaction effects between the actor and partner effects were significantly different from one another. Level of relationship satisfaction before attending Weekend to Remember did not predict changes in communication across time (time 1:  $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = .36$ ; time 2:  $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .44$ ; time

3:  $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = .47$ ). Couples' relationship satisfaction did not significantly influence change in communication over time for those who engaged in the intervention.

For conflict resolution, Model 2 was also the best fit with a Chi square = 11.28 ( $df = 5$ ),  $p = 0.05$ . Chi square information for each model is presented in Table 7 below. This model indicates that across time, the interactions between the actor and partner effects were significantly different from one another. Level of relationship satisfaction before attending Weekend to Remember did not predict mean differences in conflict resolution over time for the treatment group (time 1:  $M = 2.36$ ,  $SD = .95$ ; time 2:  $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = .89$ ; time 3:  $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = .80$ ). Couple's relationship satisfaction did not significantly influence change in conflict resolution over time for those who engaged in the intervention.

For forgiveness, Model 2 was the best fit, as well, with a Chi square = 18.84 ( $df = 5$ ),  $p = 0.00$ . Chi square information for each model is presented in Table 7 below. This model indicates that across time, the interaction effects between the actor and partner effects were significantly different. Level of relationship satisfaction before attending the Weekend to Remember did not predict mean differences in forgiveness over time (time 1:  $M = 1.10$ ,  $SD = .14$ ; time 2:  $M = 1.07$ ,  $SD = .11$ ; time 3:  $M = 1.08$ ,  $SD = .14$ ). Couples' relationship satisfaction upon entering Weekend to Remember did not significantly influence change in forgiveness over time for those who engaged in the intervention.

Table 7

*Relationship Satisfaction & Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness Model Comparison Chi Square and Significance Results for Models 1, 2, & 3*

Variable	Model	Chi Square	df	p	Model Comparison	p <sub>difference</sub>
Communication						
	1	30.05	13	.00	—	—
	2	13.08	5	.02	M1 & M2	.03
Conflict						
	1	27.10	13	.01	—	—
	2	11.28	5	.05	M1 & M2	.04
Forgiveness						
	1	61.71	13	.00	—	—
	2	18.84	5	.00	M1 & M2	.00

*Note.* N = 56.

If there is a significant  $p_{\text{difference}}$  value, then the model that was most parsimonious (e.g., the model with less df) was considered to be the best fit. If there was a non-significant  $p_{\text{difference}}$  value, then the model that allowed for more difference (e.g., the model with more df) was considered to be the best fit. If the model had a chi-square value of 0, this means the model was saturated, indicating that there are no testable hypotheses within that model.

## Research Question 2

The second research question asked if gender influenced relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness before, after, and eight weeks following engaging in the intervention for those in the treatment group. For this question, the grouping variable was gender, with dependent variables of relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Group statistics for males and females for each of the study variables at each time point are presented in Table 9. This question was analyzed using an independent samples T-test. At pre assessment, there were no significant differences for relationship satisfaction ( $t = .61, p = .54$ ), communication ( $t = -.03, p = .98$ ), conflict resolution ( $t = -.16, p = .87$ ), or forgiveness ( $t$

= -1.94,  $p = .06$ ) between males and females (See Table 8 for t-scores at each time point).

For all of the study variables measured at post and follow-up assessment, there were also no significant mean differences in consideration of gender. This suggests men and women attending Weekend to Remember did not experience significant differences in perceived relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness before, after, and eight weeks following engagement in the intervention.



Table 8

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standard Error by Gender for Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness and Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3*

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Rel Sat T1	Male	5.07	.74	.14
	Female	4.94	.90	.17
Rel Sat T2	Male	5.26	.73	.14
	Female	5.27	.77	.14
Rel Sat T3	Male	5.27	.79	.15
	Female	5.09	.82	.15
Com T1	Male	2.33	.40	.07
	Female	2.33	.33	.06
Com T2	Male	33.12	.46	.09
	Female	3.16	.43	.08
Com T3	Male	3.12	.51	.10
	Female	3.24	.43	.08
Con T1	Male	2.34	.93	.18
	Female	2.38	.99	.19
Con T2	Male	2.08	.89	.17
	Female	2.17	.90	.17
Con T3	Male	2.09	.85	.16
	Female	2.02	.77	.15
Forgive T1	Male	1.06	.10	.02
	Female	1.13	.17	.03
Forgive T2	Male	1.07	.11	.02
	Female	1.08	.11	.02
Forgive T3	Male	1.10	.16	.03
	Female	1.06	.10	.02

*Note.* Male N = 28. Female N = 27.

Rel Sat = Relationship Satisfaction, Com = Communication, Con = Conflict Resolution, Forgive = Forgiveness, T1 = Pre Assessment, T2 = Post Assessment, T3 = Follow-up Assessment.

Table 9

*Gender & Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, & Forgiveness at Pre, Post, and Follow-Up Assessment*

Variable	Time	t-Score	Mean Diff	Std. Error	Sig.
Relationship Satisfaction	T1	.61	.14	.22	.54
	T2	-.05	-.01	.20	.97
	T3	.83	.18	.21	.41
Communication	T1	-.03	-.00	.10	.98
	T2	-.30	-.04	.12	.77
	T3	-.95	-.12	.13	.35
Conflict Resolution	T1	-.16	-.04	.26	.87
	T2	-.34	-.08	.24	.73
	T3	1.14	.04	.04	.26
Forgiveness	T1	-1.94	-.07	.04	.06
	T2	-.25	-.01	.03	.80
	T3	.33	.07	.22	.74

Note. N = 55.

T1 = Pre Assessment, T2 = Post Assessment, T3 = Follow-Up Assessment.

### Research Question 3

The third research question asked how gender influenced correlations between relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at pre, post, and follow-up assessment for those in the treatment group. For this question, the within subjects independent variable was time (pre, post, and follow-up). The correlations between the variables of gender and relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness were examined.

A multi-group design using gender as the grouping variable was used to examine this research question. In Model 1, correlations between time 1 and time 2, time 1 and time 3, and time 2 and time 3 were assumed to be equal across gender. In Model 2, correlations between time 1 and time 2 were assumed to not be equal, correlations between time 1 and time 3 and time 2 and time 3 were assumed to be equal. In Model 3,

correlations between time 1 and time 3 were assumed to not be equal, correlations between time 1 and time 2 and time 2 and time 3 were assumed to be equal. In Model 4, correlations between time 2 and time 3 were assumed to not be equal, correlations between time 1 and time 2 and time 1 and time 3 were assumed to be equal. Models were compared using chi-square difference tests to determine whether the correlations across time were different across gender. A non-significant  $p$  value indicates that the model and data did not differ significantly, which means that the model fit well. Model fit comparisons are shown in Table 10. For all models, Model 1, which assumes that males and females have the same correlations for each T1 and T2, T2 and T3, and T1 and T3, fit the best.

The chi square test of model fit for relationship satisfaction showed that gender differences were non-significant, chi square = 1.44,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .70$ . Though males had higher correlations for relationship satisfaction than females at each time point, they were not significantly higher than the correlations for females. Correlations for males and females at each of the time points for the study variables are presented in Tables 11 through 14 below. For communication, gender differences were non-significant, chi square = 2.19,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .53$ . Though males had higher correlations for communication than females at each time point, they were not significantly higher than the correlations for females. For conflict resolution gender differences were non-significant, chi square = .20,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = .98$ . Though males had higher correlations for conflict resolution than females at each time point, they were not significantly higher than the correlations for females. For forgiveness, gender differences were also non-significant, chi square = 1.90,

$df = 3, p = .59$ . Though males had higher correlations for forgiveness than females at each time point, they were not significantly higher than the correlations for females. There were no statistically significant gender differences between the correlations for any of the time points within the treatment group. Males and females did not experience changes to a significant extent at any time point.

Table 10

*Gender and Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness Model 1, 2, and 3 Chi Square and Significance Comparison Results*

Variable	Model	Chi Square	df	p	Model Comparison	p <sub>difference</sub>
<b>Relationship Satisfaction</b>						
	1	1.44	3	.70	—	—
	2	.71	2	.70	M1 & M2	.39
	3	.60	2	.74	M1 & M3	.36
	4	1.32	2	.52	M1 & M4	.73
<b>Communication</b>						
	1	2.19	3	.53	—	—
	2	1.89	2	.39	M1 & M2	.59
	3	1.35	2	.51	M1 & M3	.36
	4	2.34	2	.31	M1 & M4	.70
<b>Conflict</b>						
	1	.20	3	.98	—	—
	2	.23	2	.89	M1 & M2	.86
	3	.09	2	.60	M2 & M3	.74
	4	.08	2	.96	M1 & M4	.72
<b>Forgiveness</b>						
	1	1.90	3	.59	—	—
	2	.83	2	.66	M1 & M2	.30
	3	4.42	2	.11	M2 & M3	.11
	4	1.42	2	.49	M1 & M4	.49

*Note.* N = 56.

If there is a significant  $p_{\text{difference}}$  value, then the model that was most parsimonious (e.g., the model with less df) was considered to be the best fit. If there was a non-significant  $p_{\text{difference}}$  value, then the model that allowed for more difference (e.g., the model with more df) was considered to be the best fit. If the model had a chi-square value of 0, this means the model was saturated, indicating that there are no testable hypotheses within that model.

Table 11

*Correlations of Males and Females for Relationship Satisfaction at Pre, Post, & Follow-Up*

	<b>T1M</b>	<b>T2M</b>	<b>T3M</b>	<b>T1F</b>	<b>T2F</b>	<b>T3F</b>
T1M	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2M	.67	—	—	—	—	—
T3M	.72	.60	—	—	—	—
T1F	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2F	—	—	—	.56	—	—
<b>T3F</b>	—	—	—	<b>.37</b>	<b>.41</b>	—

*Note.* N = 56.

T1 = Pre Assessment, T2 = Post Assessment, T3 = Follow-up Assessment, M = Males, F = Females.

Table 12

*Correlations of Males and Females for Communication at Pre, Post, & Follow-Up*

	<b>T1M</b>	<b>T2M</b>	<b>T3M</b>	<b>T1F</b>	<b>T2F</b>	<b>T3F</b>
T1M	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2M	.84	—	—	—	—	—
T3M	.84	.83	—	—	—	—
T1F	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2F	—	—	—	.74	—	—
<b>T3F</b>	—	—	—	<b>.70</b>	<b>.72</b>	—

*Note.* N = 56.

T1 = Pre Assessment, T2 = Post Assessment, T3 = Follow-up Assessment, M = Males, F = Females.

Table 13

*Correlations of Males and Females for Conflict Resolution at Pre, Post, & Follow-Up*

	<b>T1M</b>	<b>T2M</b>	<b>T3M</b>	<b>T1F</b>	<b>T2F</b>	<b>T3F</b>
T1M	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2M	.90	—	—	—	—	—
T3M	.80	.76	—	—	—	—
T1F	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2F	—	—	—	.76	—	—
<b>T3F</b>	—	—	—	<b>.79</b>	<b>.71</b>	—

Note. N = 56.

T1 = Pre Assessment, T2 = Post Assessment, T3 = Follow-up Assessment, M = Males, F = Females.

Table 14

*Correlations of Males and Females for Forgiveness at Pre, Post, & Follow-Up*

	<b>T1M</b>	<b>T2M</b>	<b>T3M</b>	<b>T1F</b>	<b>T2F</b>	<b>T3F</b>
T1M	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2M	.44	—	—	—	—	—
T3M	.71	.47	—	—	—	—
T1F	—	—	—	—	—	—
T2F	—	—	—	-.11	—	—
<b>T3F</b>	—	—	—	<b>.46</b>	<b>.29</b>	—

Note. N = 56.

T1 = Pre Assessment, T2 = Post Assessment, T3 = Follow-up Assessment, M = Males, F = Females.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question asked how length of marriage moderates changes and maintenance of changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness for couples attending the Weekend to Remember. For this

question, the between subjects independent variable was length of marriage, the within subjects independent variable was time (pre and post), and the dependent variables were relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Data was analyzed using the actor—partner interdependence model. In this analysis, the actor and partner main effects plus the moderator effects were examined. The moderator effect allowed examination of whether length of marriage significantly moderates changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness from pre assessment to post assessment for those in the treatment group. Unlike the previous analyses, models were not compared, since there was no group comparison component. There was no group comparison since the research question was only interested in the moderating effect of years married on change, and not how groups differed across time. In the model analyses, it was assumed that years married would significantly moderate changes in the four study variables. Each model was fit perfectly to the data, since all models were saturated.

Years married did not significantly moderate changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, or forgiveness, but did significantly moderate changes in conflict resolution. The actor, partner, and moderator effects are presented in Table 15. Although some of the actor and partner effects were significant for relationship satisfaction, communication, and forgiveness, none of the moderator effects were significant. This means that years married did not significantly moderate the change for these variables. Length of marriage did moderate conflict resolution for the actor effect, but only for females. This result means that the longer women are married, the more they were able to



improve their conflict resolution abilities over time. Otherwise, length of marriage did not moderate significant changes in the study variables for those who engaged in the intervention.



### **Research Question 5**

The fifth research question asked how religiosity moderates changes and maintenance of changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness for couples attending the Weekend to Remember. For this question, the between subjects independent variable was level of religiosity, the within subjects independent variable was time (pre and post), and the dependent variables were relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Data were analyzed using the actor—partner interdependence model. In this analysis, the actor and partner main effects and the moderator effects were examined. The moderator effect allowed examination of whether religiosity significantly moderates changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness from pre assessment to post assessment for those in the treatment group. Unlike the previous analyses, models were not compared since there was no group comparison component. There was no group comparison due to the research question's interest in the moderating effect of religiosity on change, and not in how groups differed across time. It was assumed that religiosity would significantly moderate changes in the four study variables. Each model was fit perfectly to the data, since all models were saturated.

Religiosity did not significantly moderate changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness (see Table 16 for actor, partner, and moderator effects). Although some of the actor and partner effects are significant for relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness, none of the moderator effects (indicated as interaction effects in Table 16) were significant, showing

that religiosity did not significantly moderate the change for these variables. This suggests that religiosity did not influence how impactful the Weekend Remember was upon a couples' relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness.

Table 16

*APIM Analysis Standardized Regression Coefficient and Significance Results for Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness with Religiosity as the Change Moderator*

APIM Parameters	Relationship Satisfaction		Communication		Conflict Resolution		Forgiveness	
	Estimate	p	Estimate	p	Estimate	p	Estimate	p
<b>Actor Effects</b>								
Female <sub>1</sub> → Female <sub>2</sub>	.00	.99	.67	.46	.72	.00	-.68	.11
Male <sub>1</sub> → Male <sub>2</sub>	.37	.06	1.04	.03	.27	.71	.23	.67
Rel <sub>1</sub> → Female <sub>2</sub>	-.05	.94	1.70	.54	.44	.37	.67	.88
Rel <sub>1</sub> → Male <sub>2</sub>	.35	.75	.47	.83	.28	.55	-3.05	.48
<b>Partner Effects</b>								
Female <sub>1</sub> → Male <sub>2</sub>	.39	.27	-.46	.57	.45	.01	-.64	.21
Male <sub>1</sub> → Female <sub>2</sub>	.38	.03	.08	.89	-.07	.90	.69	.27
<b>Interaction Effects</b>								
Rel <sub>1</sub> Female <sub>1</sub> → Female <sub>2</sub>	-.07	.92	-2.26	.54	-.01	.99	-.87	.70
Rel <sub>1</sub> Male <sub>1</sub> → Female <sub>2</sub>	-.55	.64	.32	.79	-.18	.79	.26	.92
Rel <sub>1</sub> Female <sub>1</sub> → Male <sub>2</sub>	-1.47	.14	-.29	.91	.39	.61	-.14	.95
Rel <sub>1</sub> Male <sub>1</sub> → Male <sub>2</sub>	1.25	.27	-.53	.54	-.47	.60	3.38	.20

*Note.* Subscript *n* indicates the variable was measured at time *n*. Results are presented as standardized regression coefficients. 1 = Time 1 or Pre Assessment, 2 = Time 2 or Post Assessment, Yrs = Years Married.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

The majority of relationship enrichment programs lack empirical validation (Halford, 2004). In particular, faith based enrichment programs lack empirical study even though a majority of individuals attend these types of programs over secular based programs (Ehlin, 1999). Relationship enrichment programs that have been evaluated with formal assessment methods (i.e., application of scientific research methods) have yielded results which indicate relationship enrichment programs are successful in improving relationship functioning (Blanchard et al., 2009; Bodenmann et al., 2001; Butler & Wampler, 1999; Halford et al., 2003; Halford, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2008; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). The results from this evaluation of Weekend to Remember, a faith based relationship enrichment program, provides meaningful evidence regarding how effective this specific program is in improving several targeted aspects of relationships: relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Additionally, results offer information regarding how gender, length of marriage, and religiosity moderate change over time in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness.

#### **Relationship Satisfaction**

It was hypothesized that couples participating in Weekend to Remember would experience an improvement in relationship satisfaction compared to the wait list control group, and that this gain would be maintained over time (eight weeks following engagement in the intervention). These hypotheses (i.e., group comparison and across

time hypotheses) were not supported by the current research study. Couples who engaged in the Weekend to Remember intervention were not found to experience significant improvements in relationship satisfaction compared with those who did not engage in the program. However, this finding is likely due to the treatment and control group couples being significantly different from one another at pre-assessment for relationship satisfaction. The reason for this difference is unclear, and may be a function of having a small sample size. Analysis of variance between the treatment and control groups revealed no significant differences between the groups (presented in Table 2 in Chapter 4). However, when using couples as the unit of analysis instead of individuals, the couples in the treatment group were significantly different from the couples in the control group. When assessing only the treatment group, relationship satisfaction increased significantly from pre- to post-assessment (over time), but this improvement deteriorated at follow-up. Over time, couples' levels of relationship satisfaction significantly increased, but this increase was not maintained at follow-up.

Previous research on other relationship enrichment programs found significant treatment effects for relationship satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2006; Demaria, 2003; Demaria, 1998; Goss, 1995; Hahlweg et al., 1998; Halford et al., 2003; Hawkins et al., 2008; Jakubowski et al., 2004; Markman et al., 1988; Markman et al., 1993; Milholland & Avery, 1982; "NREPP," 2015; Sager, 2002; Sager & Sager, 2005; Turner, 1998). Relationship satisfaction has been, in theory, linked to the couple interaction, life events, individual partner characteristics, and contextual variables (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). These aspects are theorized to influence how relationship satisfaction is or is not

sustained over time. The two factors (couple interaction and individual partner characteristics) which are capable of being influenced by intervention tend to be targeted in relationship enrichment programs, as a whole, as well as in Weekend to Remember. Weekend to Remember focuses on these two factors as a means to improve relationship satisfaction with its emphasis on communication patterns (couple interaction), conflict tendencies (couple interaction), and forgiveness attitudes (individual partner characteristics) (Halford et al., 2008). Research also suggests that conflict resolution patterns strongly influence relationship quality, particularly when the couple is in a state of turmoil versus stability (Sillars et al., 2009). Relatedly, the abilities to seek and grant forgiveness have been found to be key factors in marital longevity and satisfaction (Fenell, 1993). The overarching goal of the program is to improve satisfaction in the couple relationship (FamilyLife, 2013). This goal is targeted throughout all sessions of the intervention (FamilyLife, 2011).

The present study does not provide evidence that couples can increase their relationship satisfaction by engaging in Weekend to Remember. No effect for relationship satisfaction was able to be clearly derived due to the treatment and control group couples being significantly different from one another in relationship satisfaction at pre assessment. Additionally, this study also does not provide evidence that gains made over time in relationship satisfaction for those who engaged in Weekend to Remember were maintained. Additional research on Weekend to Remember's impact on relationship satisfaction is needed to address the limitations of the present study.

### **Communication**



It was hypothesized that couples participating in the Weekend to Remember would experience improvement in effective communication compared to the wait list control group, and this gain would be maintained over time (eight weeks following engagement in the intervention). The first hypothesis was not supported. The second hypothesis was supported. Couples who engaged in the Weekend to Remember intervention did not experience significant changes in communication compared with those who did not engage in the program. However, over time for the treatment group, communication did significantly increase and this improvement did not deteriorate over time. The first result was not consistent with existing evaluation research on other relationship enrichment programs, but the second result is consistent (Blanchard et al., 2009; Bodenmann et al., 2006; Hawkins et al., 2008; Hahlweg et al., 1998; Halford et al., 2003; Hunt et al., 1998; Jakobowski et al., 2004; Markman et al., 1993). Relationship enrichment programs tend to promote the development of healthy communication through specific interventions aimed to help couples reduce negative communication patterns and behaviors and create new, positive patterns of communication within their relationship (Blanchard et al., 2009). This is done through the provision of information about communication and activities to practice healthy communication skills (Halford et al., 2003). Weekend to Remember targets this variable through the provision of psycho-education about communication (FamilyLife, 2011) in *Session 2*. During this session, couples are: informed that each person communicates in various ways and different communication “levels” are identified. Couples are encouraged to utilize levels which increase in intimacy and transparency, and taught effective listening and expressing

skills. They are encouraged to practice these skills throughout the weekend, and during homework activities.

Though significant change was found to occur for the treatment group, and this change was maintained over time, this change cannot be attributed to the intervention because a lack of significant difference was found between the treatment and control groups at time 2 for this variable. The reason for this lack of significant difference is unclear. It may be that members of the control group were influenced by an outside variable between time 1 and time 2 which resulted in improved communication without being exposed to the intervention. For example, simply the prospect of attending Weekend to Remember in the future could have influenced the control group couples to communicate more effectively. The present study extends the literature by empirically evaluating a program which had previously been evaluated, but with methods which were not empirical in nature. It also extends the literature by evaluating a faith based relationship enrichment program. These types of programs have not historically been represented in the literature to the same degree as secular programs. The present study does not provide evidence that attendees can improve their communication by engaging in the Weekend to Remember intervention. However, those in the treatment group did experience significant gains over time, as well as maintenance of these gains in communication.

### **Conflict Resolution**

It was hypothesized that couples participating in Weekend to Remember would experience an improvement in conflict resolution compared to the wait list control group,

and this improvement would be maintained over time (eight weeks following engagement in the intervention). Both of these hypotheses were confirmed. Couples who engaged in Weekend to Remember experienced significant changes in conflict resolution compared with those who did not yet engage in the intervention. Additionally, conflict resolution improved significantly from pre to post assessment, and this improvement did not deteriorate over time (at follow-up assessment). These results are consistent with previous research on conflict resolution, which also shows evidence for improvements in conflict resolution (Durana, 1996; Hunt et al., 1998; Jakobowski et al., 2004) and maintenance of these changes after engaging in relationship enrichment programs.

Conflict patterns can be resistant to change, but it is hypothesized that there is greater potential to change these patterns than other factors contributing to conflict, such as personality traits, differences in values, expectations, social/economic conditions, or structural factors. (Sillars et al., 2004). This may be due to these other factors being more innate or external to the individual, and less malleable to re-learning efforts. Intervention aimed at improving how conflict is handled during times of relationship distress is purported to result in changes in real life conflict behavior and patterns, provided that couples maintain practice of these skills following the intervention.

Enrichment programs typically aim to isolate constructive versus destructive aspects of existing conflict patterns. Couples are taught to build upon (or create) healthy components in place of problematic tendencies (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). The Weekend to Remember targets conflict according to these approaches. The program workbook introduces the topic of conflict in *Session 6: We Fight Too, A Conflict Survival*

*Guide.* The intervention aims to normalize conflict, encourages constructive conflict, and suggests forgiveness as an essential component of healthy conflict. The normalization of conflict is a commonly used intervention with couples (Stanley et al., 2002, p. 189). The concept of constructive conflict is supported through research by Cummings, Faircloth, Mitchell, Cummings, & Schermerhorn (2008), who found psychoeducational skills training in arguing constructively (i.e., active listening, remaining in the “here and now”, checking for accuracy) to be effective in improving couples’ conflict. Weekend to Remember suggests that couples ask where the conflict is coming from (i.e., are “rights” being violated, are expectations not being met, is one feeling hurt), examine the problem to determine if confrontation is indeed the appropriate step, consider personal contributions to the problem, and choose an appropriate time for the conversation and deliberately consider the words one uses (FamilyLife, 2011). These suggestions are consistent with theories and empirically supported interventions, including communications skills training (Guerney, 1977) and systems theory (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). The current research provides additional support for theories which suggest that providing education about and teaching skills for healthy conflict resolution promotes the development of improved conflict resolution. It extends the literature by evaluating a faith based relationship enrichment program which had not been previously empirically evaluated. The present study provides evidence that couples can improve their conflict resolution skills and maintain this improvement for at least two months.

### **Forgiveness**

It was hypothesized that couples participating in Weekend to Remember would experience significant improvements in forgiveness in comparison to the control group, and this gain would be maintained over time (eight weeks following engagement in the intervention). The first hypothesis was not supported in the current research due to extreme skewness of this variable in the data. The second hypothesis was not supported. Forgiveness did not significantly improve over time for the treatment group and therefore conclusions regarding the maintenance of changes could not be made.

Fincham et al. (2004) suggest a multidimensional conceptualization of forgiveness, which includes a decreased negative motivational state and increased positive motivational state towards the harm-doer. “Unforgiveness” describes the avoidance of unwanted or unacceptable self-image inspired by the transgression and the corresponding negative emotions (Fincham et al., 2004). The first dimension of forgiveness according to Fincham et al. (2004), involves the victim overcoming a negative of self-portrayal which is promoted by the transgressor’s behavior. The other dimension of forgiveness suggested by Fincham et al. (2004) concerns its positive direction. It is hypothesized that forgiveness is not only achieved by overcoming avoidance goals, associated with the first dimension, but also requires motivation for approach behaviors. Motivation for approach behaviors and motivation to overcome avoidance behaviors arise from separate motivational systems, and therefore the positive forgiveness dimension cannot be inferred by absence of the negative/avoidance dimension (Fincham et al., 2004). The Weekend to Remember explores forgiveness through a Biblical context with participants, and provides steps in seeking and granting

forgiveness. The forgiveness concepts that are taught are consistent with the aforementioned theories of forgiveness. Investigation of forgiveness in dyads as opposed to individuals has been lacking, despite the growing attention the construct has received in the past decade (Fincham et al., 2004; Fincham et al., 2008; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002; Ripley & Worthington, 2002; Worthington & DiBlasio, 1990). This has been attributed to complications inherent in initiating discussion of past transgressions when both members of the couple are present (Ripley & Worthington, 2002). In one of the first evaluations of forgiveness in couples research, significant treatment effects were not found compared to the wait-list control group (Ripley & Worthington, 2002).

The results of the present study are not able to provide additional support for these theories of forgiveness or for how Weekend to Remember impacts this variable. The first hypothesis was not supported due to significant skewness of this variable. Results of analyses of the second hypothesis did not reveal significant changes in forgiveness for the treatment group between pre- and post-assessment. Therefore, it could not be stated that long term gains were made in forgiveness.

### **Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution**

It was hypothesized that forgiveness would be significantly associated with conflict resolution before, directly following, and eight weeks following engagement in Weekend to Remember for the treatment group. This hypothesis was partially confirmed. Higher levels of forgiveness were significantly associated with lower levels in the conflict resolution measure (i.e., healthier conflict resolution) and lower levels of forgiveness were significantly associated with higher levels of the conflict resolution

measure (i.e., poorer conflict resolution) before attending the intervention and eight weeks after the intervention, but not directly following engagement in Weekend to Remember.

Forgiveness has been previously associated with conflict resolution (Worthington & Wade, 1999), and it has been purported to promote closure of painful relationship experiences and facilitate reconciliation (Fincham et al., 2004). Research suggests that because of these factors, forgiveness has the capacity to be highly influential in relationship interaction patterns. Couples who engage in “tit for tat” sequences are especially susceptible to unforgiveness (Fincham, 2004). Partners may feel more justified to engage in destructive problem solving behaviors when there are unforgiven transgressions in the relationship (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002).

Previous research has not evaluated the relationship between forgiveness and conflict resolution in the context of relationship enrichment programs. The forgiveness and conflict literature suggest higher levels of forgiveness would be significantly associated with better conflict resolution. This relationship was confirmed in the present research before couples engaged in the enrichment program, as well as eight weeks following this engagement. The lack of significant association directly following engagement in Weekend to Remember was unexpected. This result is surprising, and the reason for this is unclear. It may be that couples conflict resolution was impacted to a greater extent than forgiveness (as demonstrated by other analyses) right after engaging in the intervention, creating a discrepancy in this correlation. Over time, this difference

diminished, and the relationship between conflict resolution and forgiveness was strengthened. Further research evaluating this relationship is needed.

### **Relationship Satisfaction and Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness**

It was questioned whether a couple's level of relationship satisfaction upon entering Weekend to Remember would influence changes in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. It was found that relationship satisfaction was not significantly associated with the other study variables. Level of relationship satisfaction did not influence significant changes in communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness.

Couples at varying levels of distress have been found to engage in relationship enrichment programs. However, the most positive significant effects from relationship enrichment programs may be found in couples who reported higher levels of distress upon entering the intervention (Allen et al., 2012; Halford et al., 2001). In other research, universal benefit for couples at varying levels of distress engaging in relationship enrichment programs was found two to five years following the intervention (Markman et al., 1988). Regarding communication, meta-analysis of nearly 100 evaluations of relationship enrichment programs on this factor demonstrated program effects at post-assessment for more distressed couples and at long term follow-up for less distressed couples (Blanchard et al., 2009). Relatedly, examination of forgiveness and its relationship to conflict resolution in couples has yielded evidence of both factors' independence from relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2004).



The results of the present study provide information regarding whether or not a relationship exists between level of relationship satisfaction at pre assessment and changes in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness over time for those who engaged in the intervention. A significant relationship between couples' relationship satisfaction at pre assessment and changes in communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness over time was not found. The present study provides evidence that level of distress (i.e., relationship satisfaction) upon entering Weekend to Remember did not influence significant changes over time in communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness.

### **Gender**

It was questioned whether the gender of the participants influenced relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness and whether the gender of participants influenced change in the same study variables before, right after, and eight weeks following engagement in the intervention. No significant gender differences were found among the study variables at any of the time points. There were also no significant gender differences when comparing correlations between any of the time points.

Gender differences in relationship satisfaction and reporting of other relationship problems have been found in some previous relationship enrichment evaluation research (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Robins et al., 2000), while in other studies no differences were found (Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Feeney, 2002; Hawkins et al., 2008). For communication, evaluation research on enrichment programs has not found evidence of gender differences (Hawkins et al., 2008). In terms of conflict resolution, more effective

methods (characterized by collaboration and compromise), have been found to occur equally across males and females (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000). Gender differences in forgiveness have been found about half of the time in the existing forgiveness literature (Fincham et al., 2006; Karremans et al., 2003, Miller et al., 2008). The current research contributes to the literature in this area, providing evidence for no gender differences between males and females in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict management, and forgiveness before, after, and eight weeks following engagement in Weekend to Remember. There is also a mixed body of research regarding the influence of gender on the impact of relationship enrichment programs. Small effect sizes have been found for gender (Halford et al., 2010), but non-significant effect sizes have also been found (Allen et al., 2011; O'Halloran et al., 2013; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006). Several other studies have been unable to make strong conclusions as to whether or not gender differences influence gains from relationship enrichment programs (Allen et al., 2011; Duncan et al., 2010; Halford et al., 2010; O'Halloran et al., 2013). No significant gender differences among relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness were found at pre, post, or follow-up assessment. Additionally, no significantly gender differences were found among gains in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness at pre, post, or follow-up assessment.

### **Length of Marriage**

It was questioned whether the length of being married significantly moderated changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness for couples engaging in Weekend to Remember. Interventions aimed at promoting

positive relationship patterns have been found to be more successful the earlier they are implemented in the relationship (Doss et al., 2003; Kaiser et al., 1998; Snyder et al., 1993). Other evaluations of relationship enrichment programs have tended to focus on couples who have been married for shorter periods of time for this reason (Halford et al., 2003). Therefore, less is known about how these types of programs influence couples who have been married for longer periods of time.

The current study contributes evidence of the influence of length of marriage on relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness after engaging in this specific relationship enrichment program. Years married did not significantly moderate changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, or forgiveness, but did significantly moderate changes in conflict resolution. Although some of the actor and partner effects were significant for relationship satisfaction, communication, and forgiveness, none of the moderator effects were significant. This means that years married did not significantly moderate changes in these variables. Length of marriage did moderate conflict resolution for the actor effect, but only for females. This result means that the longer couples are married, the more women, but not the couple, were able to improve their own conflict resolution. Longer married males are not demonstrating this same improvement in conflict resolution, though. Other analyses did not reveal gender differences among any of the study variables, including conflict resolution. Future research examining the moderating effect of gender and length of the relationship on changes in conflict resolution is needed.

### **Religiosity**

It was questioned whether level of religiosity significantly moderated change in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness for couples engaging in this intervention. In previous research, religiosity has been more predictive of participation in relationship enrichment programs than any other demographic variable (Doss et al., 2009). Religiosity has been found to have a positive relationship with healthy conflict resolution (Curtis & Ellison, 2002; Fincham et al., 2008; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney et al., 1999) and forgiveness (Fincham et al., 2008; Holeman, 2003). The relationship between religiosity and communication has not been represented in the literature. The current study contributes evidence for the influence of religiosity on relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness after engaging in this specific relationship enrichment program. In the present research, no significant results were found for the moderating effect of religiosity on changes in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, or forgiveness for those in the treatment group. This suggests that level of religiosity did not moderate how impactful the Weekend Remember was upon the study variables for couples who engaged in this intervention.

### **Limitations and Future Considerations**

The results of the present study should be considered in light of several potential limitations. First, participants self-selected to participate in the research. Researchers did not have control over who would opt to participate or who would be in the treatment or control groups. The resulting sample was somewhat diverse in age, number of years married, and education level (frequencies and percentages of these variables presented in

Table 1); however, it was comprised almost entirely of white, middle-class individuals. Due to the cost of Weekend to Remember, lower socioeconomic individuals have reduced access to this intervention, as well as to the internet. Recruiting procedures could have included physical advertisements and allowed an option for paper and pencil survey completion. Future evaluation research of Weekend to Remember should make concerted efforts to include a more diverse sample.

The sample for the current study had a mean relationship satisfaction score of 16.5/21 on the CSI-4. This was very close to the mean for the general population (16/21). It appears that couples who opted to attend Weekend to Remember and participate in the research were similar to the general population in terms of relationship satisfaction, which is a strength of the present research. However, couples in the treatment group ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) and control group ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) differed significantly in levels of relationship satisfaction, which prevented the analysis of Weekend to Remember's impact upon relationship satisfaction in the treatment group compared to the wait list control group in Hypothesis 1 from being interpretable. Future research should aim to assess this variable with comparable sample groups in order to assess Weekend to Remember's impact on relationship satisfaction. Additionally, the current research utilized a naturalistic method to observe and describe the participants in the real-life situation of the intervention. An analog sample was not used; the study participants were actual attendees at Weekend to Remember. The Weekend to Remember intervention was already naturally occurring, and was not influenced by the present study. Conditions were not artificially created, therefore there is greater ecological validity. However, this is also

a limitation due to the lack of control available outside of a laboratory setting. Because the study only targeted individuals/couples who engaged in Weekend to Remember, the findings should not be construed as generalizable to relationship enrichment programs as a whole or to individuals with lower relationship satisfaction. Future evaluation efforts of Weekend to Remember should assess individuals reporting a range of relationship satisfaction (i.e., some with greater levels of distress) upon entering the intervention.

Due to the wide-spread availability of Weekend to Remember programs, this researcher was unable to monitor program adherence or participant engagement in the intervention. Each Weekend to Remember follows the same manualized format, but different speaker-couples facilitate each program, providing their own examples and nuances to how the intervention is presented. Depending upon the talent and skill of the facilitators, the protocol may be more or less effectively presented to participants. It was not possible in this study for protocol adherence to be standardized or monitored. Participants in the treatment group were asked to respond to open ended questions in the post assessment questionnaire regarding what they found most and least beneficial about the intervention. This was done as a means to gauge their level of engagement in Weekend to Remember. Individuals who provided meaningful responses to these questions were included in the present research. Responses met criteria as meaningful if they: mentioned a specific aspect of Weekend to Remember and provided some detail about what made it beneficial or not beneficial. However, despite this attempt to monitor treatment integrity, it was not possible to fully evaluate how engaged couples were with the intervention or when responding to the assessment questions. It is possible that

individuals/couples completed the assessments without attending or engaging in a meaningful way with the treatment intervention or without being thoughtful about their responses.

Lastly, web-based surveys tend to have lower response rates than mail surveys (Dillman et al., 1995; Dillman et al., 2009). Retention in the present study was quite low, with many individuals completing the informed consent form, then subsequently fewer and fewer with each survey. After extending the recruitment period by six months, only 49 couples in total completed all phases of the research (either two surveys for those in the control group or three surveys for those in the treatment group). This was a small sample, which also limits statistical power for the analyses. Lower power makes it difficult to detect effects. Future evaluation of Weekend to Remember should make efforts to recruit a larger sample size. Additionally, utilizing random assignment to create the control and treatment groups would help to ensure that the two groups were equivalent and allow stronger conclusions to be made regarding the effects of the intervention. Relatedly, future research could utilize multiple sources of data rather than solely relying upon self-report measures to assess the impact of Weekend to Remember. For example, observational methods and/or qualitative data would broaden the information available to promote additional insights regarding the effectiveness of this intervention.

### **Treatment Implications**

The results of the current study provide implications for enrichment treatments for couples. These findings indicate that Weekend to Remember can help couples

significantly improve their conflict resolution, and this improvement can be maintained over time (at least eight weeks following the intervention). The results also suggest that over time, couples who engage in Weekend to Remember can significantly improve their communication, and this gain can be maintained over time (at least eight weeks following the intervention). Engaging in Weekend to Remember for one weekend could potentially enrich couples' relationships, long after the intervention is over. Future research is needed to assess whether persons from diverse populations and lower levels of relationship satisfaction would benefit from this intervention. Circumstances in which a relationship enrichment program would not be appropriate, such as where intimate partner violence is occurring, should be considered by clinicians when choosing whether to recommend this intervention to couples.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I became interested in evaluating Weekend to Remember after attending the conference and learning there was no empirical evidence of its effectiveness. When I was researching other relationship enrichment programs and learned there is an overall lack of rigorous evaluation of these interventions, the need for this kind of research was further impressed upon me. Tens of thousands of couples engage in these types of programs across the United States and around the world. Counseling psychologists involved in couple enrichment programs have a responsibility to ensure these programs are doing what they say they are doing (helping couples improve their relationships), and at the very least ensure no harm is occurring through participation. Working with the FamilyLife organization presented challenges. Being such a large organization, it was



difficult to ascertain which individuals' approval was needed, and how to get their approval. At times, communication within the organization was lacking, which compromised data collection by limiting the number of individuals who were invited to participate in the research. This constrained the sample size of the study. Data collection was also complicated due to a lack of both members of the couple participating at each of the time points.

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## APPENDIX A

## weekend to remember evaluation

event city: \_\_\_\_\_ event start date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

wedding date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ ☐ male ☐ female

last name: \_\_\_\_\_ first name: \_\_\_\_\_ fiancé(e) \_\_\_\_\_

(If known, please provide your address once you are married if different from registration)

address: city:  state:  ZIP: primary phone: (  )  ☐ home ☐ work ☐ cellWhat type of communication do you prefer? ☐ phone ☐ e-mail ☐ texting ☐ mailage range: ☐ 29 or below ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60 or aboveIs this your first marriage? ☐ yes ☐ noyou can make a  
difference

I desire to make a difference in families:

- ☐ I'm interested in bringing a group to a Weekend to Remember.
- ☐ Please contact me about joining the local volunteer team.

life-changing  
decisions

During this weekend, I made the following decision:

- ☐ I received Christ as Lord and Savior this weekend.
- ☐ I prayed to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- ☐ I recommitted my life and family to Christ.

supporting our  
staff

Many of our staff have left their careers to serve as full-time missionaries at FamilyLife. They depend on individuals like you to fund their personal ongoing ministry and living expenses. If you check the box below, one of our staff families will personally contact you about how you can invest financially in their ministry.

- ☐ Yes, I'd be interested in helping financially partner with a FamilyLife staff member.
- ☐ Please provide me with more information

1. How would you rate the overall Weekend to Remember?

poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 excellent

2. How likely would you be to invite a friend to the pre-married sessions at Weekend to Remember?

not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 likely

3. Did the getaway meet your expectations? ☐ Yes ☐ No If not, why not?

continued on back

4. How often would you consider coming back to Weekend to Remember?  
☐ Every \_\_\_\_ year(s)   ☐ not at all
5. How did you hear about the Weekend to Remember (mark the single most important influence)?  
☐ Church: which one? \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ E-mail  
☐ Friend/Family  
☐ *FamilyLife Today* broadcast: which station? \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Radio advertising: which station? \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Mail  
☐ Web site: which site? \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Other: how? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What were the most important things you learned from the weekend?
7. What was the highlight of the weekend for you?
8. Did the weekend help you to answer questions you had about getting married?
9. Did the weekend provide confirmation to the direction of your relationship?  
☐ Yes   ☐ No   How?
10. May we quote you?   ☐ yes   ☐ no
11. What other things could FamilyLife do/offer to help you get started in your marriage?

Other comments:

## APPENDIX B

getaway schedule				
time	topic	page	guest	
	introduction/FamilyLife information	1-9		friday
7:00-7:30	welcome to your weekend to remember		all	
7:30-8:30	why marriages fail	11	all	
8:30-8:45	break (resource center open)		all	
8:45-9:30	can we talk?	23	all	
9:30-9:50	project (resource center open)	workbook	all	
8:00-8:30	resource center open			saturday
8:30-9:20	unlocking the mystery of marriage	31	all	
9:20-9:35	break (resource center open)		all	
9:35-10:25	from how to wow	41	all	
10:25-11:40	project (resource center open)	workbook	married	
	so you wanna get married	pre-married manual 5	pre-married	
11:40-12:30	what every marriage needs	51	all	
12:30-2:00	lunch (resource center open)		all	
2:00-3:05	we fight too	65	all	
3:05-3:20	helping others		all	
3:20-3:30	break (resource center open)			
3:30-4:30	marriage after dark	77	all	
	project (complete before Sunday sessions)	workbook	all	
4:30-5:00	help for today (resource center open until 5:30 p.m.)		optional	
4:30-5:30	pre-marrieds: two becoming one	pre-married manual 35	pre-married	
sat. evening	date night			
9:00-10:30	woman to woman	87	all women	sunday
	man to man	107	all men	
10:40-11:10	hope for tomorrow (resource center open)		optional	
11:10-12:00	how marriages thrive	121	all	
12:00-12:30	leaving a legacy	127	all	
	answer key	132		
	resource center open 20 minutes after last session			

## APPENDIX C

## Speaker Training

## Table of Contents

## GETTING ACQUAINTED

Team Biographies &amp; Introductions

## SEVEN STAGES OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The Communication Cycle

## THE MESSENGER

## STAGE 1 – SPEAKER INTERNALIZATION

## STAGE 2 – WORDS

## STAGE 3 – SPEECH

## THE AUDIENCE

Introduction To The Audience

## STAGE 4 – DISTRACTIONS

## STAGE 5 – LISTENING

## STAGE 6 – LISTENER INTERNALIZATION

## STAGE 7 – FEEDBACK

## THE MESSAGE – Part 1: Philosophy

## HISTORY OF FAMILYLIFE

## MESSAGE OF FAMILYLIFE

## STRATEGY OF FAMILYLIFE

## Split Sessions

## MEN

## WOMEN

## THE MESSAGE – Part 2: Preparing

## LIVING IT

CARRYING IT

ILLUSTRATING IT

ORGANIZING IT

DELIVERING IT

Split Sessions



## APPENDIX D

## Speaker Critique

We value your opinion. Please drop in one of the boxes at the back of the Ballroom when finished.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE ON BACK OF THIS FORM

Speaker: (Male Speaker's Name)

1.) How well the speaker presented the material in a way that made sense to me.  
(Please circle)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Unsatisfactory

Outstanding

2.) How well the speaker's presentation motivated me to make changes personally and/or in my marriage. (Please circle)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Unsatisfactory

Outstanding

3.) Some specific ways that the speaker's presentation helped me in my marriage include...

4.) I have these additional comments concerning the speaker and his presentation:

Speaker: (Female Speaker's Name)

2.) How well the speaker presented the material in a way that made sense to me.  
(Please circle)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Unsatisfactory

Outstanding

2.) How well the speaker's presentation motivated me to make changes personally and/or in my marriage. (Please circle)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Unsatisfactory

Outstanding

3.) Some specific ways that the speaker's presentation helped me in my marriage include...

4.) I have these additional comments concerning the speaker and his presentation:



## APPENDIX E

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 COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN  
 EDUCATIONAL
 

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***INFORMED CONSENT FORM*****An Evaluation of the Impact of Couples Enrichment Programs on Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, & Forgiveness*****Purpose of the Research:***

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a couples enrichment program. To be included in the study, you must be a part of a married heterosexual relationship planning to attend The Weekend to Remember enrichment program during which relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness are promoted.

***Procedures:***

The research includes couples who are planning to attend a couples enrichment program, The Weekend to Remember, conducted by the FamilyLife organization. Attendees who choose to participate in the research are divided into two groups based upon the date of their scheduled Weekend to Remember. One group will complete five questionnaires prior to, immediately following, and eight weeks after attending and engaging in the program. The other group will complete five questionnaires one month prior to and one week prior to engaging in the program. Both you and your spouse will be asked to complete the informed consent form and questionnaires individually, without consultation with your spouse. The five scales to be used for this study each administration will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. These scales assess individual view of your relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. The results of the assessment instruments will not be shared with you or your spouse. The researcher will also obtain information regarding the significance of religion in your life and level of engagement in the enrichment program, as well as demographic information. By checking the signature box on this consent form, you agree to share your email address with the researchers. You are also allowing this researcher to use your email address to send the questionnaire links to you. Additionally, you will be asked to provide your spouse's private email address so that we can send your

spouse an informed consent form. If your spouse does not agree to participate, you will not be asked to complete the research.

***Risks and/or Discomforts:***

Participants are to be involved in The Weekend to Remember enrichment program. The risks of this study are minimal, and would be similar to those one might experience when disclosing information about oneself, one's feelings, or one's relationship to others. Though the research itself involves little or no risk or discomfort, involvement in relationship enrichment and answering questions involving personal and relationship issues could

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☐ Please check this box to indicate you have read this page.

potentially be emotionally upsetting. Potential harm could also come from disagreement between you and your spouse's separate responses to the questionnaires, if you choose to discuss them with one another. In the event of emotional problems resulting from participation in the study you may contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness (1-800-950-6264) or [info@nami.org](mailto:info@nami.org) which is a free information helpline that provides information, referrals, and support. If you need to seek services as a result of participating in the research, you are responsible for all associated costs.

***Benefits:***

There is no direct benefit to the participants. Research findings can potentially aid in promoting greater understanding of the benefits of marital enrichment programs.

***Alternatives:***

The alternative to participation in this study is to not participate. Choosing not to participate will not exclude you or your spouse from The Weekend to Remember enrichment program.

***Confidentiality:***

Results provided by you and your spouse will be kept in strictest confidence. Data collected will be aggregated and therefore, be anonymous to everyone but the researchers. The responses/raw data will not be shared with FamilyLife. Only

aggregate data will be shared with FamilyLife. If you agree to participate please supply your private email address at the end of this form. Email addresses are only linked to questionnaire responses by pin numbers. You and your spouse will be assigned your own confidential pin number. All email addresses and corresponding pin numbers will be kept confidential using a password-protected computer which means only the researchers will have access.. Your responses will not be shared with you or your spouse. Once the study is completed, all the email addresses and corresponding pin numbers will be deleted.

***Compensation:***

If you and your spouse agree to participate, you will each be emailed a 30% off coupon code to be used at the familylife.com online bookstore. You will receive this coupon code even if you do not complete all phases of the research. After completing all phases of the study, you and your spouse will be entered into a drawing to win free registration for The Weekend to Remember (\$300 value) or a \$50 Amazon.com gift card. Neither of these gift cards expires. This drawing will occur at the completion of all data collection for the study. You will be notified if you win the drawing by August 18, 2015. The odds of winning either gift card are 1 in 290. If you are drawn to win The Weekend to Remember gift card you will be required to provide your social security number to the UNL Bursar's office in order to receive this incentive. This is required by the UNL Bursar's office to receive items over \$50, and will only be shared and stored with this entity. This is not required if you win the \$50 Amazon.com gift card. The researchers will keep no record of this information; it will be deleted upon delivering it to the UNL Bursar's office. If you are randomly chosen to win these incentives, you will be notified via your private email address. If you are the winner of The Weekend to Remember gift card you will be contacted by e-mail and asked for your phone number for the Primary Investigator to call to collect your social security number.

***Opportunity to Ask Questions:***

If, at any point during the research process, you have questions regarding the nature of the research or anything else pertaining to the process, you are welcome to contact the researchers. You may call the primary investigator, Chelsi Klentz Davis, at (308) 379-8181 with any of these questions. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant that are unanswered by the researcher or have any other concerns regarding the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 4726965.

***Freedom to Withdraw:***

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. This decision will have no effect regarding your standing at The Weekend to Remember, FamilyLife, or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

***Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:***

By checking the signature box below, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this research as conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as well as share your private email address and your spouse's private email address to be sent incentives and questionnaire links. Please print a copy of this form to keep.

☐

***Signature Box. By checking this signature box this means you have decided to participate and have read everything on this form.***

**[Space to provide their private email address]**

**[Space to provide their spouse's private email address]**

**Identification of Investigators:**

**Primary Investigator**

Chelsi Klentz Davis, MA  
(308) 379-8181

**Secondary Investigator**

Michael J. Scheel, Ph.D.  
Office (402) 472-0573

## APPENDIX F

## Pre-Notice Email for Treatment Group

Greetings,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the evaluation study of The Weekend to Remember! You will be sent a link in the next few days to complete as part of your participation in this research. The link will lead you to a set of questionnaires to complete within *one* week. Your responses are stored on the Qualtrics secure server and will not be shared with anyone besides the Primary and Secondary Investigators listed below. The questionnaires will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please complete this questionnaire on your own, without consultation with your partner within one week. To say thanks, you will receive a 30% off coupon code to the FamilyLife online bookstore after completing this questionnaire! After completing your second survey, you will be sent *Moments Together for Couples*, a spiritual devotional for couples. Following completion of your third survey, you will receive a copy of either *For Women Only: What you Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men* or *For Men Only: A Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women*. At the conclusion of data collection, each individual who completed all phases of the research were entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Amazon online gift card.

We appreciate the donation of your time to participate in this research!

Warmly,

Chelsi

Primary Investigator  
Chelsi Klentz Davis, MA  
(308) 379-8181

Secondary Investigator  
Michael J. Scheel, Ph.D.  
Office (402) 472-0573

## APPENDIX G

## Thank You/Reminder Email

Greetings,

Thank you for consenting to participate in my evaluation study of The Weekend to Remember! You were sent a questionnaire link to fill out, and our records show this has not yet been completed. Please provide your responses before your link expires in two days. The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Thank you in advance for completing your questionnaire.

Warmly,

Chelsi

[Qualtrics Link]

Primary Investigator  
Chelsi Klentz Davis, MA  
(308) 379-8181

Secondary Investigator  
Michael J. Scheel, Ph.D.  
Office (402) 472-0573